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JOSEPH CONRAD IN 1898

From the portrait by Miss E. M. Heath

LETTERS FROM CONRAD

1895 to 1924

EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

EDWARD GARNETT

WITH TWO PORTRAITS

THE NONESUCH PRESS

16 GREAT JAMES STREET, BLOOMSBURY, W.C.

INTRODUCTION

I

Of this volume of *Letters from Conrad* thirty-one have appeared in *The Life and Letters of Joseph Conrad* edited by M. G. Jean-Aubry. The others have not been published before. Apart from other points of interest it may be said that this series supplies at first hand fuller and closer information about the first four years of Conrad's work after he had turned author, than can be gathered from his letters to others. I met Conrad first as the "publisher's reader" who had recommended *Almayer's Folly* and, as the earliest of his literary friends, he came to me first for criticism and advice. He showed me the MS. of everything he wrote up to November 1898. I thus saw and in turn commented on: *An Outcast of the Islands*, *Tales of Unrest*, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, *The Rescue* first draft, and the tentative chapters of *The Sisters*. The first hundred letters, chiefly filled with Conrad's literary development and his difficulties in composition, show in detail his struggles, his hopes and fears, his dejections and exultations from month to month. More than twenty years later when Conrad wrote the Preface to the "Collected Edition" (1920), his memory naturally failed to recall many facts and details preserved by these letters, *e.g.* his chronology of the composition of *Tales of Unrest* is wrong. My own memory certainly did not retain a tithe of the details which the Letters set down. They fill out my general recollection that as regards Conrad's work, 'ninety-five

was a leisurely year, 'ninety-six was a strenuous, prolific year, while 'ninety-seven and 'ninety-eight were years of struggling anxiety, years largely wasted over his unavailing labour over *The Rescue*, till with *The Heart of Darkness*, begun in December 1898, Conrad suddenly found the channel clear and forged ahead.

As I have said, I first met Conrad in November 1894, some months after I, as Mr. Fisher Unwin's "reader", had written one of my hasty, perfunctory "reports" and had advised the acceptance of *Almayer's Folly*. My friend, Mr. W. H. Chesson, whose duty it was to take charge of the manuscripts, tells me that he called my particular attention to *Almayer*. My wife recollects that I showed her the manuscript, told her it was the work of a foreigner and asked her opinion of his style. What particularly captivated me in the novel was the figure of Babalatchi, the aged one-eyed statesman, and the night scene at the river's edge between Mrs. Almayer and her daughter. The strangeness of the tropical atmosphere, and the poetic "realism" of this romantic narrative excited my curiosity about the author, who I fancied might have eastern blood in his veins. I was told however that he was a Pole, and this increased my interest since my Nihilist friends, Stepniak and Volkhovsky, had always subtly decried the Poles when one sympathized with their position as "under dog". Since I spent the greater part of every week in the country I rarely made the acquaintance of authors whose manuscripts I had read. But on this occasion Mr. Fisher Unwin arranged a meeting between Conrad and me at the National Liberal Club. On the last Christmas before his death, Conrad described to Mrs. Bone his recollection of this first meeting, and I

quote from the account she has sent me. "The first time I saw Edward", he went on, "I dare not open my mouth. I had gone to meet him to hear what he thought of *Almayer's Folly*. I saw a young man enter the room. 'That cannot be Edward so young as that', I thought. He began to talk. Oh yes! It was Edward. I had no longer doubt. But I was too frightened to speak. But this is what I want to tell you, how he made me go on writing. If he had said to me, 'Why not go on writing?' I should have been paralysed. I could not have done it. But he said to me, 'You have written one book. It is very good. Why not *write another*?' Do you see what a difference that made? Another? Yes, I would do that. I *could* do that. Many others I could not. Another I could. That is how Edward made me go on writing. That is what made me an author."

My memory is of seeing a dark-haired man, short but extremely graceful in his nervous gestures, with brilliant eyes, now narrowed and penetrating, now soft and warm, with a manner alert yet caressing, whose speech was ingratiating, guarded, and brusque turn by turn. I had never seen before a man so masculinely keen yet so femininely sensitive. The conversation between our host and Conrad for some time was halting and jerky. Mr. Unwin's efforts to interest his guest in some political personages, and in literary figures such as John Oliver Hobbes and S. R. Crockett, were as successful as an attempt to thread an eyeless needle. Conrad, extremely polite, grew nervously brusque in his responses, and kept shifting his feet one over the other, so that I became fascinated in watching the flash of his pointed patent leather shoes. The climax came unexpectedly when in answer to Mr. Unwin's casual but

significant reference to "your next book", Conrad threw himself back on the broad leather lounge and in a tone that put a clear cold space between himself and his hearers, said: "I don't expect to write again. It is likely that I shall soon be going to sea." A silence fell. With one sharp snick he had cut the rope between us and we were left holding the loose end. I felt disappointed and cheated. Mr. Unwin expressed some deprecatory ambiguities and then, after turning his falcon-like glance down the long smoking-room, apologized for having to greet some friends in a far corner.

Directly he had left Conrad and me alone, speech came to me in a rush. I may have been as diplomatic as Conrad has recorded.[1] What I then said to him with the fervency of youth would seem to me a little bizarre now, had I not caught myself the other day, thirty years later, addressing a young author with much the same accents and convictions. But I spoke then with youth's ardent assurance. My thesis was that the life Conrad had witnessed on sea and land must vanish away into the mist, and fade utterly from memory did he not set himself to record it in literature. And *Almayer's Folly* showed that he had the power. Conrad listened attentively, searching my face, and demurring a little. It seemed to me afterwards that he had come to meet me that night partly out of curiosity and partly as an author who, deep down, desires to be encouraged to write. And the *credo* he heard matched his conviction that it was the thing that he could do

[1] Author's note to *An Outcast of the Islands*. Collected Edition, 1919. "A phrase of Edward Garnett's is, as a matter of fact, responsible for this book", etc. Conrad has, however, misdated this conversation, which took place at our first meeting.

that mattered. This *credo* about artists in general, and Conrad in particular, the curious will find set forth in a paper written in 1898 in *The Academy*.[1] It was no doubt partly my curiosity about Conrad's life as a sailor in the Eastern Seas that winged my words, and, curiously, the heavy, middle-class atmosphere of the National Liberal Club with its yellow encaustic tiles, cigar-smoke, provincial members, political gossip from the "lobbies" and business news "on the tape", jarred less and less in the presence of this stranger who charmed one by something polished and fastidious in the inflexions of his manner. Yes, he had "the temperament". After Mr. Unwin's return the talk naturally fell to an ordinary level and shortly afterwards we bade our host good-night and Conrad strolled some way with me on my way past the brilliantly lighted Strand. Our relations had been settled for good by this first contact.

We did not meet again for some weeks, when Conrad invited me to spend the evening with him at Seventeen Gillingham Street. After dining in a private room at a Wilton Street restaurant where an obsequious Italian waiter dashed up and down stairs all wreathed in smiles, I was introduced to Conrad's snug bachelor quarters where, having placed me in an easy chair, Conrad retired behind a mysterious screen and left me to study the cosiness of the small firelit room, a row of French novels, the framed photograph of an aristocratic lady and an engraving of a benevolent, imposing man on the mantelshelf. On a little table by the screen lay a pile of neat manuscript sheets. I remained con-

[1] An "Appreciation of Mr. Joseph Conrad" reprinted in *Friday Nights*, 1922.

scious of these manuscript sheets when Conrad reappeared and plunged into talk which ranged over things as far removed as the aspects of Malay rivers and the ways of publishers. Conrad's talk that night was a romance; free and swift, it implied, in ironical flashes, that though we hailed from different planets the same tastes animated us. To no one was the art of harmonizing differences so instinctive when he wished to draw near; to no one was the power of emphasizing them more emphatic when he did not. There was a blend of caressing, almost feminine intimacy with masculine incisiveness in his talk ; it was that which gave it its special character. Conrad's courtesy was part of his being, bred in the bone, and serving him as a foil in a master's hand, ready for attack or defence. That first evening he took from the mantelshelf and showed me the portrait of his mother with her sweet commanding eyes, and told me that both she and his father, a poet and translator of Shakespeare, had been arrested at the time of the Polish rising of 1862, and had afterwards been sent into exile. Of himself Conrad spoke as a man lying under a slight stigma among his contemporaries for having expatriated himself. The subject of Poland was then visibly painful to him, and in those early years he would speak of it unwillingly, his attitude being designed to warn off acquaintances from pressing on a painful nerve. Later he grew less sensitive and in a letter in 1901 he sketched at length his family history and connexions.

In response to this first confidence about his family, thrown out with diffidence, I gave him some idea of my own position, which, at that time, as indeed later, was peculiarly isolated. A stranger to editors and to

literary cliques, I had no influence outside the publishing firm I worked for; but I could and did give new authors encouragement and practical advice about placing their work. My few literary friends were struggling young men, such as W. B. Yeats, men abler than myself and not so unskilled in the methods of success. My six years' work as a publisher's reader had taught me fully the anxieties and the hazards of the literary life, but youth believes instinctively that luck is on its side, and I had been lucky in finding authors for Mr. T. Fisher Unwin. However, to Conrad, ten years my senior, and incomparably more versed in worldly affairs, the ways of publishers, reviewers and editors were then an uncharted land, and his first view of New Grub Street, as he put it later to me, was "as inviting as a peep into a brigand's cave and a good deal less reassuring". When, later that evening, I had recurred to the subject of *Almayer's Folly*, Conrad suddenly picked up the pile of MS. sheets from the little table and told me that he had embarked on a second book and that I should live to regret my responsibility for inciting him. This charming flattery was very characteristic of Conrad. Placing the MS. in my hands he retired behind the screen and left me to glance through the pages. By the time he had reappeared with a bottle of Benedictine I had been captivated by the brilliant opening of *An Outcast of the Islands*. I exclaimed with delight at the passage :

> They were a half-caste, lazy lot, and he saw them as they were—ragged, lean, unwashed, undersized men of various ages, shuffling about aimlessly in slippers ; motionless old women who looked like monstrous bags of pink calico stuffed with shapeless lumps of fat, and deposited askew upon

decaying rattan chairs in shady corners of dusty verandahs; young women, slim and yellow, big-eyed, long-haired, moving languidly amongst the dirt and rubbish of their dwellings as if every step they took was going to be their very last.

Conrad, exhilarated by my praise, then described his ideas of the downhill path of Willems and foreshadowed Aissa's part in the drama. The plot had already taken shape in his mind, but most of the action was still in a state of flux. Conrad's attitude to *The Outcast* was from the first a strange blend of creative ardour and scepticism. He spoke deprecatingly of his knowledge of Malay life, but all the same the figures of Willems, Joanna and Aissa captivated his imagination. His sardonic interest in Willems' disintegration reflected, I believe, his own disillusionment over the Congo. I agree with M. Jean-Aubry that Conrad's Congo experiences were the turning-point in his mental life and that its effects on him determined his transformation from a sailor to a writer. According to his emphatic declaration to me, in his early years at sea he had "not a thought in his head". "I was a perfect animal", he reiterated, meaning, of course, that he had reasoned and reflected hardly at all over all the varieties of life he had encountered. The sinister voice of the Congo with its murmuring undertone of human fatuity, baseness and greed had swept away the generous illusions of his youth, and had left him gazing into the heart of an immense darkness. But Willems' figure was not merely the vehicle for Conrad's sardonic irony, but through it Conrad had to express also his own "romantic feeling of reality"; and so this character had to bear too great a burden both of feeling and commentary. I do not think that this criticism was

ever formulated exactly by either Conrad or myself, during the nine months in which *An Outcast* came to me in batches, for he was too engrossed in wrestling with his characters to see precisely the effect of all the parts in relation to the whole, and I was too enthralled by the strange atmosphere and poetic vision, and too intent on encouraging him, to criticize Willems till the end was at hand. I well remember pencilling notes of admiration on the margins of certain pages, as on those poetical passages that conclude Part II. However, on the delivery of the final instalment I criticized adversely the psychology of Willems' motives and behaviour just before his death at Aissa's hands; and Conrad agreed, with reservations, to my strictures and set to work to remodel various passages. I think now that my criticism was not so just as I imagined at the time. Probably no record exists now of the cancellations and emendations made by Conrad in the last chapter (*see* his letter, Sept. 24, 1895).

However, to come back to that first evening at Gillingham Street, I recall that Conrad took alarm at some declaration of mine about the necessity for a writer to follow his own path and disregard the public's taste. His tone was emphatic. "But I *won't* live in an attic!" he retorted. "I'm past that, you understand? I *won't* live in an attic!" I saw then that it was essential to reassure Conrad about the prospects of *Almayer's Folly*. And I cited the names of various authors who, whatever they may have been doing, were certainly not then living in attics, public favourites such as Stevenson and Kipling and Rider Haggard—the work of the last-named, I remember, Conrad stigmatized as being "too horrible for words". He ob-

jected specifically to the figure of Captain Goode, as well he might! As I look back at that evening and at our subsequent meetings in little Soho restaurants, in Newgate Street, St. Paul's Churchyard and in a Mecca café in Cheapside, I recall an atmosphere of humble conspiracy *à deux*, which enfolded us. Humble, since Conrad then was more obscure than any publisher's reader. At that time he was experiencing all the hot and cold fits and the exultations of literary creation, often thrown back and sceptical, but also boyishly eager while perfecting his strokes and broadening his effects as *An Outcast* grew under his hands; and I was taking this development of his genius for granted and was enthusiastic over the romantic magic of his scenes. My part indeed was simple—to appreciate and criticize all that he wrote, and to ask for more, more.

II

While Conrad's brilliant charm arrested our notice in those early years, the depth of his creative vision eluded us. In his voice we heard the seaman and the artist speaking, but the poet, secretly inspiring the finest subtleties of his work, remained unseen. From what I gathered, then and since, of Conrad's parents I believe that from his mother he inherited his caressing sweetness, and from his father his sharp and sombre insight, with its fierce sardonic underplay. There were two natures interwoven in Conrad, one feminine, affectionate, responsive, clear-eyed, the other masculine, formidably critical, fiercely ironical, dominating, *intransigeant*. Often the sweet mood would change in a flash, and with an upward fling of the head he would stare hard with wide-opened sardonic eyes at the per-

petrator of some fatuity or sentimental falsity. His eyes would grimace ironically, and he would boil over suddenly while attempting to conceal his violent distaste; and the person who had awakened this mood would go away and circulate some alarming legend about his intractability. In the impetuosity of his prejudiced judgments, Conrad had a streak of Lieutenant Feraud, but also the contemplative wisdom and clarity of vision of Lieutenant D'Hubert, those two immortal creations of his own. His fine courtesy kept his Polish impetuosity in check in those early years; but he resented bad manners when addressed, and I remember the slighting remarks of a Mr. N. at a National Liberal Club meeting in 1895 so chafed on him that he would have sent the speaker a challenge had the country been France. But unless offended or rubbed the wrong way he was as sympathetic and as softly responsive to people as a sensitive woman. I remember being struck by this quality one day in the summer of 1897, when he had taken me for a sail in the boat that he shared with his old sailor friend, G. F. W. Hope, at Stanford-le-Hope. The plan was to land at some jetty lower down the Thames, but the wind kept dying away on each occasion as we tacked and neared the bank, and we lay becalmed for over an hour in the hot glare, Hope disdaining to put out an oar. Conrad deferred, like a young sailor boy, with alacrity to his least wish and drew him out in talk with a fine tact, while whispering to me that to row the boat ashore was unthinkable, for such a proceeding would wound Hope's pride as a seaman!

Conrad's moods of gay tenderness could be quite seductive. On the few occasions I saw him with

Stephen Crane he was delightfully sunny, and bantered "poor Steve" in the gentlest, most affectionate style, while the latter sat silent, Indian-like, turning enquiring eyes under his chiselled brow, now and then jumping up suddenly and confiding some new project with intensely electric feeling. At one of these sittings Crane passionately appealed to me to support his idea that Conrad should collaborate with him in a play on the theme of a ship wrecked on an island. I knew it was hopelessly unworkable this plan, but Crane's brilliant visualization of the scenes was so strong and infectious that I had not the heart to declare my own opinion. And Conrad's sceptical answers were couched in the tenderest, most reluctant tone. I can still hear the shades of Crane's poignant friendliness in his cry "Joseph!" And Conrad's delight in Crane's personality glowed in the shining warmth of his brown eyes. When Conrad wished to surrender himself to anybody he did it single-heartedly in irresistible fashion. I remember on the occasion of a visit which he and Jessie Conrad paid to the Cearne in 1898, coming suddenly on him and my son David, aged six, sailing on the grass plot in a big basket in which fruit-trees had been sent, rigged up with a broomstick, a table-cloth and a clothes-line. The illusion of a real boat was strangely complete, with Conrad shifting the sheet in the breeze, going on fresh tacks, while giving sharp orders to the boy crew in nautical language. This gay buoyancy of spirit, while more in evidence in early years, contrasted curiously with the antithetic mental atmosphere of Conrad's sardonic brooding and disenchantment with life. The serious, contemplative stare Conrad's features often assumed in repose, with a shade of the saturnine,

is well rendered in Miss E. M. Heath's portrait of him, done in 1898, a likeness which he himself declared bore a strong resemblance to his father. The portrait does not however convey the extraordinary soft warmth of Conrad's eyes, which always struck me when talking with him. The painting was executed in a single sitting at the Cearne while I tasked myself to entertain him. One of my anecdotes drew from him the following: "Yes, dear Edward. But have you ever had to keep an enraged negro armed with a razor from coming aboard, along a ten-inch plank, and drive him back to the wharf with only a short stick in your hand?" But to recur to the temperamental moods that blend in Conrad's creations and endow them with the most complex qualities, one may say that the Korzeniowski parental side, with its "terrible gift of irony", "rules", as astrologers put it, over the majority of the pages of *The Secret Agent*, and that his Bobrowsky heritage rules similarly over most of the pages of *The Mirror of the Sea*. Of course these are approximate labels, but, as M. Jean-Aubry has shown, the letters to Conrad from his maternal uncle Thaddeus Bobrowsky attribute many of Conrad's traits to his Korzeniowski inheritance. One of the finest examples of the fusion of the two moods in Conrad's temperament, to my mind, is that example of his Polish virtuosity *The Duel*. That brilliant, gay, ironical, masterpiece has been underrated because the Anglo-Saxon is temperamentally unsympathetic to its qualities. I once witnessed a ludicrous interview between Conrad and a certain hard north-country Englishman who shall here be nameless. Conrad, for an admirable reason, was anxious to propitiate his host, but his ingratiating

manner roused the Englishman's suspicions, and the latter became stiffer and harder, while Conrad struggled bravely to disarm his insular doubts. It was a relief when we had bowed ourselves out from this dour north-countryman's presence. Great quickness of eye was one of Conrad's gifts. I remember while sitting one evening with him in the Café Royal I asked him, after a painted lady had brushed haughtily past our table, what he had specially noticed about her. "The dirt in her nostril", he replied instantly. On this acute sense rested his faculty of selecting the telling detail, an unconscious faculty, so he said. I remarked once of the first draft of *The Rescuer*, that as a seaman he must have noted professionally the details of the rainstorm at sea described in Chapter III. Conrad denied this, and asserted that all such pictures of nature had been stored up unconsciously in his memory, and that they only sprung into life when he took up the pen. That Conrad's memory had extraordinary wealth of observation to draw on I had an illuminating proof in *Heart of Darkness*. Some time before he wrote this story of his Congo experience he narrated it at length one morning while we were walking up and down under a row of Scotch firs that leads down to the Cearne. I listened enthralled while he gave me in detail a very full synopsis of what he intended to write. To my surprise when I saw the printed version I found that about a third of the most striking incidents had been replaced by others of which he had said nothing at all. The effect of the written narrative was no less sombre than the spoken, and the end was more consummate ; but I regretted the omission of various scenes, one of which described the hero lying sick to death in a native

hut, tended by an old negress who brought him water from day to day, when he had been abandoned by all the Belgians. "She saved my life", Conrad said; "the white men never came near me." When on several occasions in those early years I praised his psychological insight he questioned seriously whether he possessed such a power and deplored the lack of opportunities for intimate observation that a sailor's life had offered him. On one occasion on describing to him a terrible family tragedy of which I had been an eye-witness, Conrad became visibly ill-humoured and at last cried out with exasperation: "Nothing of the kind has ever come my way! I have spent half my life knocking about in ships, only getting ashore between voyages. I know nothing, nothing! except from the outside. I have to guess at everything!" This was of course the artist's blind jealousy speaking, coveting the experiences he had not got, and certainly he could have woven a literary masterpiece out of the threads I held, had he known the actors.

I may here note that Conrad's "strong foreign accent" in March 1893, to which Mr. Galsworthy has testified in his *Reminiscences of Joseph Conrad*, seemed to me only slight in November 1894. But when he read aloud to me some new written MS. pages of *An Outcast of the Islands* he mispronounced so many words that I followed him with difficulty. I found then that he had never once heard these English words spoken, but had learned them all from books!

III

Conrad's slow progress in increasing his circle of readers demands some explanation. Nineteen years of arduous work (1895–1913) failed to bring him into real popularity. It was not the fault of the reviewers. His work was too "exotic" for British insular taste. From the first he received eulogistic notices, but it is forgotten that several score of Conrad's popular contemporaries were also then receiving notices as, or more, flattering. Good reviews of "exotic" novels do not excite general interest, and it is probable that the figure of the lady on the "jacket" of *Chance* (1914) did more to bring the novel into popular favour than the long review by Sir Sidney Colvin in *The Observer*. In any case the fact that the critics' handsome praise of *Almayer's Folly* failed to sell the novel is attested by my old friend, Mr. David Rice, then Mr. Fisher Unwin's town traveller, who at my instigation had prevailed on the booksellers to subscribe practically the whole edition. Mr. Rice tells me that the majority of the copies rested for years on the booksellers' shelves, and that the title *Almayer's Folly* long remained a jest in "the trade" at his own expense. Conrad's first book took seven years to get into the third impression and both *The Outcast of the Islands*, which received brilliant reviews, and *Tales of Unrest*, took each eleven years to reach a second impression. Even worse, relatively, was the case of *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897) which in spite of a general blast of eulogy from a dozen impressive sources, including James Payn, A. T. Quiller-Couch, W. L. Courtney, and the advantage of its serialization in W. S. Henley's

New Review, took sixteen years to reach its third impression! While *Lord Jim* doing better, had to wait nine years (1904–14) to pass from the fourth to the fifth impression, and *Youth* (1903) took six years to pass from the second to the third.

After the further revision of the last chapter of *The Outcast of the Islands*, when he wrote (Letter, September 24, 1895), "I shall set to at once and grub amongst all these bones", Conrad took a spell off from writing, and when he began again he found it impossible to make headway with *The Sisters*. He was so depressed by his position that he explained to me his hopes of getting a command at sea and I wrote to a friend of my wife, Mr. Charles Booth the shipowner, to try and interest him in Conrad's future. Mr. Booth's reply throws light on Conrad's own proposal :

24, *Great Cumberland Place, W.* 22 *Feb.* 1896.

Dear Mr. Garnett,

I am afraid I can do nothing to help Mr. Conrad. I wish I could. He certainly can write and it seems very hard if he cannot find present living with hope of future fame in his pen. He must be a very remarkable man.

The plan of a captain taking a share of the vessel he commands with the management is I believe common, but such work lies outside of my own experience. Such vessels are often called "family ships" being got up in that way amongst those who are related to each other. The Welsh do it a good deal and the Norwegians still more. It needs for success a closer eye for small economies than is found amongst the English.

But there may be better chances of success in the South Seas with which Mr. Conrad is evidently acquainted.

I do not suppose it would be possible for him to step into a regular command amongst strangers without beginning as mate and waiting his chance—and while mate there would be no opportunity for writing.

I wish I had had anything more encouraging to say—It is curious and rather melancholy that almost everyone has a discouraging word to say against the work with which he is most closely connected in these overcrowded days.

However it is I hope Mr. Conrad will continue to write stories.

Yours sincerely

CHARLES BOOTH

Conrad's light-hearted reply, February 29, 1896, about the cast-iron impudence of his soul was characteristic and he then confided to me the news of his approaching marriage, and soon brought down Miss George to the Cearne to see my wife. Conrad's ultra-nervous organization appeared to make matrimony extremely hazardous, but his instinct proved right, and Jessie Conrad's temperament was perfect; calming him and taking the daily trials and rubs of life off his shoulders. But I do not think that Jessie, or anybody not a writer, could understand the extraordinary nervous strain and agony which composition imposed on Conrad, in those early years. He has expressed this with his incomparable power in various letters to his intimate friends. And I will quote a few lines from his letter of August 5, 1896: "I have had bad moments with the *Outcast* but never anything so ghastly, nothing half so hopeless. When I face that fatal manuscript (*The Rescuer*) it seems to me I have forgotten how to think—worse how to write. It is as if something in my head had given way to let in a cold

grey mist. I knock about blindly in it till I am positively physically sick and then I give up saying—to-morrow! And to-morrow comes and brings only the renewed and futile agony." But these days of writers' paralysis alternated with others of creative fecundity. Conrad during the same period (May–July 1896) had written in Brittany *The Idiots*, ten thousand words, *An Outpost of Progress*, nine thousand five hundred words, and *The Lagoon*, five thousand seven hundred words, in August, in the intervals of sitting day after day, for two months before the manuscript of *The Rescuer*, "powerless to invent or add a single word". Before he stopped dead by June 10th, he had however written and despatched the last portion of the first draft, 103 pages of *The Rescuer*. Had I suspected the long Odyssey of acute distress and worry that Conrad was to undergo over *The Rescuer* (not published till twenty-four years later), I would of course have persuaded him to abandon the book. But this draft of Part I. was powerful and original, and I wrote him two enthusiastic letters, May 26th and June 17th, 1896, part of the first of which I give here :

The Cearne. May 26, '96.

Excellent, oh Conrad. Excellent. I have read every word of *The Rescuer* and think you have struck a new note.

The opening chapter is most artistic; just what is right for an opening chapter. The situation grips one with great force. It is as clearly and forcibly *seen* as if one had spent a month on those seas—(that is the highest praise). You bring before one wonderfully the sense of *boredom*, the oppression of the stillness and the heat, and all the monotony of life. And then the etching of the mate's portrait and the descrip-

tion of the crew is very finely done—up to your best level. I think it will strike the Public too (the great gross Public that you accuse me of knowing!) as very interesting and very fresh.

I enclose some hasty criticisms—mere whims of mine on only *minute* points. The only page I would like to see altered is page 1. There the *description*, the tone seems to me not up to your level. The *feeling*—though poetical—seems a little *forced*, a little dragged out of you, a little over-elaborated—and not in keeping with the clear realism of all the forcible, vivid 24 pages that follow etc.

"But oh! can't I be bad! can't I", he answered on June 2, and on June 10, when sending me the last pages he asked me to say if he was on a wrong track. My answer and my commendation of *The Idiots* some weeks later, reassured him. He wrote, July 22, "After reading your letters I don't touch the ground for three days", and he sent me *An Outpost of Progress*, adding in his shamelessly flattering way, that he had written it especially for me! But he added the serious news that an old friend he loved had been unfortunate in his business affairs and that in consequence he, Conrad, had lost his little capital. In the letter of August 5, referred to above, he had deplored that "the belief, the brazen, thick-headed, thick-skinned immovable belief" was not in him. For many many hours I sat with Conrad in those early years trying to assuage his doubts, fears and anxieties about his writing powers. I remember one such occasion, particularly: it was at the Cearne on a warm night in September 1898, when we sat long in the porch in the lamplight, smoking and arguing, while the moths fluttered into our glasses, and at length, after mid-

night, Conrad, exasperated, got to his feet, saying sarcastically, "It's indecent! I shall not forgive you for letting me unburden myself like this. Why didn't you stop me!" We were worn out, I by his desperation, and he by my sympathy. I must add a word here about Conrad's play of irony. He was so perfect an artist in the expression of his moods and feelings that it needed a fine ear to seize the blended shades of friendly derision, flattery, self-depreciation, sardonic criticism and affection in his tone. And so with his early letters, many of which show a wonderful chameleon-like quality, sometimes both parodying his own admissions and turning the light of his irony from himself on to his correspondent. One must guard oneself against taking his moods, his flatteries, his cries of distress in his *Letters* either too absolutely or too lightly. The publication of his *Letters* has shown what a variety of appealing tones Conrad had at his command both when addressing old friends and new acquaintances. So with the private compliments he pays his fellow-authors. The reader needs to be something of an artist himself to appreciate the shades of pleasing flattery on Conrad's palette. He says in a letter of March 11, 1911, "It's easier to make phrases about things that hit and glance off, and as to things that miss me of which I only feel the wind, so to speak, I could write politely by the yard of them". Sometimes Conrad did write by the yard, so to speak, especially towards the end of his life, when his facility was assisted by the necessity of dictating his correspondence.

Conrad's return from Brittany in September 1896 came to me in the form of a message—" When are you

coming up to London. . . . When? How? Will you see me? Are you well? Have you time? Have you the wish?" At our meeting I found him very concerned about his prospects. In his six months' stay in Brittany he had earned about £75 for three short stories. *The Rescuer* was at a standstill and he had written ten pages of *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. The loss of most of his little capital made it imperative that he should receive better payment for his work, but all that Mr. Fisher Unwin would offer him was £50 on account of a ten per cent royalty on the first 2000 copies—the same terms as for *An Outcast of the Islands*, and Conrad demanded £100 on account. On my advice Conrad held out for these terms, but Mr. Fisher Unwin refused to go beyond his original proposal. I do not blame Mr. Unwin: I am told that the sales of Conrad's three early books showed a loss, in the publisher's ledger, for many years. But it was imperative that Conrad should find another publisher with faith in his future and I now suggested that he should negotiate with Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co., who had sent him flattering enquiries about his next book. I did not know till twenty years later that it was Mr. Roger Ingpen who, impressed with *An Outcast of the Islands*, had urged Mr. Reginald Smith to make overtures to Conrad. Alas! Mr. Reginald Smith, that ex-lawyer, with his bland, mellifluous flow of compliments to authors (later I experienced them on Kropotkin's account) offered Conrad nothing more substantial than a £50 immediate advance on a higher royalty; and he also advised him to put his book of short stories "away for a time". This would not do at all, and I then went to S. S. Pawling, of Heinemann's, and put the case frankly

before him. Pawling, "a good sort", as authors said, of whom I will speak in another place, though overshadowed by his partner Heinemann, was alive to the opportunity of getting hold of Conrad, and he sent him reassuring messages, saying that he would show the portion of the MS. of *The Nigger of the Narcissus* to Henley for publication, and that anyway Conrad might expect better terms than Mr. Unwin had offered him. The six letters from Conrad to me, November 25–January 10, when he was struggling day and night to finish *The Nigger of the Narcissus* show that those seven weeks were perhaps the most strenuous in the whole of his writing life. The story of the finish of *Nostromo*—as detailed in a letter of September 2, 1902, to John Galsworthy—has indeed an impressive epic quality, but Conrad's place as an author was then assured. And had Conrad failed to "bring off" *The Nigger*, or had the novel missed fire, in the reviewers' eyes, as many a masterpiece has done, nothing more disheartening for Conrad and ominous for his future could be imagined. The prospect, indeed, looked alarming for an almost penniless author. But Conrad, inspired by his devil, did not falter. His heart was in his work. After a reassuring message from Henley I brought Pawling and Conrad together in a dinner at the Hotel D'Italie, and what I remember of the evening is that Pawling succumbed wholly to the charm and the talk of this strange seaman author. Conrad continued his desperate struggle for another month, and in his final letter, January 10, 1898, is the cry of victory. "And the end! I can't eat. I dream nightmares and scare my wife. I wish it was over. But I think it will do. It will do! Mind I only think, not sure.

But if I didn't think so, I would jump overboard." But the end did not come till January 17, when, after finishing *The Nigger*, Conrad exhausted took to his bed for two days. As he said, it was a cheap price for finishing that story.

[1] After a short spell of rest Conrad began a story, "a Malay thing", *Karain*, which he thought would be easy to write and might bring in "a few pence". On February 28, in sending me part of the MS., he tried an old trick of his by asserting he would burn it at my command, but if I said "Correct—Alter", he would refuse to do so. However, this draft of *Karain* was not satisfactory, and Conrad set to work to remodel the tale. It took him six weeks to finish "that infernal story", which he never liked, and when finally he forwarded it to Mr. Fisher Unwin to serialize it if possible, he asked me, April 14, to " read it specially because it is your advice that has reshaped it and made it what it is—in good." I remember leaving 11 Paternoster Buildings, a few days later, in Conrad's company and halting on the pavement opposite Newgate Prison, while, jostled by the passing crowd, I declared positively that *Karain* was destined by Providence for *Blackwood's Magazine*. For some reason Conrad never forgot this Newgate Street prophecy and recurs to it fourteen years later, "it is you who turned *Karain* on

[1] In the Author's Note to *Tales of Unrest* Conrad says, "*Karain* was begun only three days after I wrote the last lines of *The Nigger*." But his letters to me show that he was then collapsed and "doing nothing yet". His memory betrayed him here, as it did more conspicuously in the Author's Note to *The Rescuer* where he gives various reasons for not returning to *The Rescuer*, whereas his letters show that he was struggling ineffectually to write *The Rescuer*, off and on, for a year and a half.

to Maga. with inspired judgment". But in fact I believed then it was a case of Maga. or nothing. However, when Blackwood's did accept the story, Conrad refused the terms offered, and insisted on £40 as its price, which Blackwood's agreed to pay on condition that Conrad should give it the refusal of any short story he might write. Thus began Conrad's connection with Blackwood's. These details are only worth resurrecting to show the state of protracted tension and anxiety as to the saleability of his work which Conrad suffered from in 1897. He received forty-five shillings per thousand words from Maga., and since *Karain* had taken him two months to write he had earned scarce sufficient to keep the wolf from the door of "Ivy Walls" to which house he had moved on March 13, from the jerry-built little villa in Victoria Road, Stanford-le-Hope. I well remember the creaking boards, flimsy staircase and pokiness of this temporary dwelling-place which stood indistinguishable from its fellows in a genteelish row. "Ivy Walls", an old farm-house with its low-ceilinged, quiet rooms was a far more congenial abode, and there Jessie Conrad entertained one with amusing anecdotes of the bean-pickers who slept in the barn and secreted the farmer's hens for the sake of breakfast eggs. To return to *Karain*, Conrad's letters to me show that he had not, as Mr. Munro states in his Introduction to the *Nigger of the Narcissus*, Memorial Edition, "thrashed out for himself theories and convictions on the art of fiction through years of concentrated lonely thoughts at sea". Conrad worked by intuition after a preliminary meditation, just as his criticism of other men's work was intuitive and not the fruit of considered theory. He was, of

course, always interested in literary technique and good craftsmanship, such as Flaubert's and Maupassant's—he said, May 1898, of the latter's *Bel-Ami*, "it's simply enchanting to see how it's done". But he never theorized about it and many years later on asking me why I had never written on the art of fiction and receiving my reply that the subject was too difficult for my brains, he declared that it was also too difficult for his, and that he had never formulated any rules for his own practice. His method of narrative, in the first person, through the mouth of Marlow, was first employed in *Youth*; it came natural to him, it saved trouble, and finding it answer both there and in *Heart of Darkness* he elaborated it further in *Lord Jim*. I remember Conrad one day when he was very depressed at his lack of popular success throwing down some miserable novel by Guy Boothby which he vowed he would imitate, saying: "I can't get the secret of this fellow's manner. It's beyond me, how he does it!" Turgenev's technique he declared was inimitable, because he got effects by phrases deceptively simple. He instanced Paklin's drive in the carriage with Sipyagin (*Virgin Soil*, Chapter XXXIV.) as a scene exquisitely done. His admiration for Henry James's short stories was, I believe, called forth by that master's delicacy of touch. A letter to me, February 13, 1897, emphasizes this, and about this time he gave me a copy of *The Lesson of the Master* and instanced the story *Brooksmith* as a *tour de force*. Bernard Shaw he could scarcely read for impatience, and he remarked to me on one occasion, "The fellow pretends to be deep but he never gets to the bottom of things but rides off on some tricky evasion".

The last five months of 1897 Conrad spent in wrestling with *The Rescuer*, "often restraining tears, never restraining curses", and in writing *The Return*, which is without question the least convincing of his stories. He had discussed the subject with me in the spring, but when I received the MS. at the end of September, the effect of the whole seemed strangely unnatural, and the treatment over-logical. Conrad metaphorically tore his hair, admitted that he knew that there was something wrong with it all the time, and declared that he felt all I said but all the same he remained as much in the dark as though I had spoken an impassioned dialogue in Chinese! He sent the story about to various editors, but nobody would accept it, and it was printed as the fifth story in *Tales of Unrest* —which book Conrad sold to Mr. Fisher Unwin for £50 or £60 down on account of a 10 per cent royalty. *The Nigger of the Narcissus* was published in the first week of December 1897, and received twenty-three reviews, one indifferent, one bad, two or three hesitating, and the rest "unexpectedly appreciative". Pawling had introduced Stephen Crane to Conrad in October, and in a letter of December 5 following, the latter writes of Crane, "he is strangely hopeless about himself . . . he is the *only* impressionist and only an impressionist". The year ended with the deceptive news, "I am writing *The Rescuer*. I am writing! I am harassed with anxieties but the thing comes out." 1897 had been an unprolific year for Conrad, due to the curse of impotence which paralysed his brain when he sat down to *The Rescuer*, but he had formed the connection with Blackwood's which was to lead him to contribute two of his brilliant stories, *Youth* and *Heart*

of Darkness and the novel, *Lord Jim*, which he originally planned as 20,000 words. And here I may bring to a close this cursory sketch of Conrad's First Books. Although he had said in August 1897, "You know very well I daren't make any move without your leave", my advice as his literary friend and critic was in fact now becoming unnecessary. Apart from *The Rescuer*, which he continued to send me, chapter by chapter, he had confidence in himself and was receiving encouragement from various quarters. When Conrad was particularly pleased with his work he pooh-poohed it in his letters —"This is the sort of rot I am writing now", he says for example about *Lord Jim*, and again, "I send you second instalment of 'Jim'—which is too wretched for words". After *The Rescuer*, for many years to come he no longer sent me his MS. for private criticism, though *Letters from Conrad* will show that we remained in touch about his work up to the end.

The letters to his intimate friends reveal marvellously Conrad's personality, his buoyant temperament and resilient moods, his uncanny insight, his sceptical faith and philosophic irony, his charming frankness and great affectionateness, his flashing wit, his humour often playful, often fiercely sardonic. His generous warmth of feeling for his friends, new and old, rushes out now spontaneously, now super-polished, so to say, by his Polish habit of paying everybody compliments. This impulse, like the Irish habit of saying agreeable things to the newcomer, appears at times a little disproportionate, but it was a characteristic racial trait and an expression of his warm temperament. His letters to me are most characteristic, now exuberant, now subtle, now direct. He once told me that it was a

great relief to him not to have to maintain the beauty of his script when he wrote to me.

In the period 1902–1916 there were years when we saw little of one another. To each of us time brought fresh claims, the constant ties of work and of family habits, with new friends and new commitments in life, but these did not diminish our settled affection and old confidence. Conrad had faith in my criticism and the reviews I wrote of various of his books from 1900 to 1914 reaffirmed the bonds of our old friendship. When worldly success came at last to Conrad it increased his desire to refer to the old days and to remind one of any offices done him in the early years of authorship. Loyalty to memories of the past and to the men he had worked with at sea and on shore was a deep, abiding trait in his nature.

On the last visit I paid to "Oswald's" Conrad had been fatigued, I think, in the week, by visitors, transatlantic and others, pressing in with their homage, and after our last hour's talk together something moved me as we said good-night, to put his hand to my lips. He then embraced me with a long and silent pressure. The next morning as we stood talking in his study, when the car was announced, he suddenly snatched from a shelf overhead a copy of the Polish translation of *Almayer's Folly*, wrote an inscription in it and pressed it into my hands. When I looked I saw that the date he had written in it was the date of our first meeting, thirty years before.

EDWARD GARNETT.

October 1927.

1895

the world of ideas attempt or experiment is the dawn of evolution.

Once more thanks!

Yours very faithfully

J. Conrad

17 *Gillingham Street S.W. Tuesday evening* [*January* 8. 1895.]

Dear Mr Garnett

Your date and hour will do very well. I shall be in the City on Wednesday week and if you are there also on that day perhaps I may pick you up somewhere on my way to the wild west? If this proposal unacceptable don't trouble to say so. I shall understand if I don't hear from you that I am to wait for you at home at 7 p.m.

I have your book;[1] have read it once and now am strolling backwards and forwards—with great delight —amongst your words, your sentences and your thoughts.—

You no doubt have the gift of the "mot juste", of those sentences that are like a flash of limelight on the façade of a cathedral or a flash of lightning on a landscape when the whole scene and all the details leap up before the eye, in a moment and are irresistibly impressed on memory by their sudden vividness. But of that more when we meet. Now I want only to say that

[1] *An Imaged World.* Poems in Prose. By Edward Garnett. Dent, 1894.

An Imaged World charmed my eyes with a charm of its own—distinctly.

Yours very faithfully

J. Conrad

Friday 17 *Gillingham St S.W.* [*March* 8. 1895.]

Dear Garnett

I send you 4 chapters of the "Outcast" who—as you will perceive—is very much so. More than ever.—Your talk yesterday put so much life into me that I am reluctantly compelled to suspect you of good nature. Do not be offended for I do not mean any harm in charging you with such a "bourgeois" (or Philistine) failing. Even our friends are not perfect! This world is a dreary place and a prey to minor virtues. A dreary place—unless a fellow is a Willems of some kind and is stuffed full of emotions—without any moral—when he may discover some joviality or other at the bottom of his load of anguish. But that's a lottery; an illegal thing; the invention of the Devil.

In chap. XII beginning with the words:

"And now they are . . ." are the two pars in the new style. Please say on the margin what you think. One word will do. I am very much in doubt myself about it; but where is the thing, institution or principle which I do not doubt?!

I shall advise you by autograph of my return from the Cont: because the fashionable intelligence of the

Pall Mall [Gazette] neglects me in a most unaccountable way. Till then

Vale

Yours

J. Conrad

Friday morning 17 *Gillingham St. S.W.* [*March* 15. 1895.]

Dear Garnett

I arrived from Brussels about an hour ago and found your letter. I've read it with my hat on, rug over the arm, and umbrella hanging by its tassel-string to my finger. Then I undressed, unpacked and before breaking bread read once more. I could not have had a more charming welcome. To be read—as you do me the honour to read me—is an ideal experience—and the experience of an ideal; and as I travel from sentence to sentence of your message I feel my unworthiness more and more. Your appreciation has for me all the subtle and penetrating delight of unexpected good fortune—of some fabulously lucky accident like the finding of a gold nugget in a deserted claim, like the gleam of a big diamond in a handful of blue earth.

Theory is a cold and lying tombstone of departed truth, (for truth is no more immortal than any other delusion). Yet a man is nothing if not perverse.—That's why Willems lies buried under my pet theory even while I stand by, lamenting and grinning with the spade in my hand. I cannot weep, by all the devils! I

cannot even sneer at my dead. All you say is true. All, Absolutely—and the only thing that I can think of is to administer to myself a moral bastinado—say five hundred on the soles of my unsteady and erring feet.—

Having propitiated you by the barbarous cruelty of my punishment I profer my request. Will you meet me next Thursday? any time after six. Or name a day and the time that would suit you best. We shall *not* talk of Willems. Just simply dine—feast of body—not of soul. Soul be hanged!

Yours very faithfully

J. Conrad

This is only to let you know that letter and MS received—also that your words have not fallen into barren ground. The crop will ripen in good time. You shall see.

May 1*st* 1895 17 *Gillingham St.* 6. *A m.*

Dear Garnett

I am going to look for Willems in Switzerland. It is written. I go! today at 9 a.m.

I resolved yesterday. Called on F. U. who says Henley can't read more than 60 pages of the immortal work [1]—after which he "lays it down". Despair and red herrings! Suicide by thirst on Henley's doorstep—no. Emigration to Champel and hydropathy when re-

[1] *Almayer's Folly.*

turn with Alpenstock branded (untruthfully) "Monte Rosa" and brain the sixty-page-power Henley. Cause Celèbre. Fame. Therefore I go, Tuan!—

Seriously, I find I can't work. Simply can't! I am going to try what mountain air combined with active fire-hose (twice a day) will do for divine inspiration, I shall try it for about 3 weeks and maybe the lenient gods will allow me to finish that infernal Manuscript. Sorry can't send you the 4 chaps. Just come from type —not corrected. I shall (mem) take them with me and when back administer to you the whole of the poison in one large (and therefore merciful) dose.

I take advantage of your friendly disposition towards my unworthy self to ask you for news of Alm: in about a fortnight. Speak true talk to him who has been raised from the dust by your merciful hand—that is: say what *You* think of the chances.[1]

Yours very faithfully

J. Conrad

Address. J. Conrad
La Roseraie
Champel
Genève

[1] *Almayer's Folly* had just appeared. Its reception by the reviewers was generally favourable. *The Daily Chronicle* saying, "Mr. Conrad may go on, and with confidence: he will find his public and he deserves his place;" *The Saturday Review*, "*Almayer's Folly* . . . will certainly secure Mr. Conrad a high place among contemporary story-tellers;" *The Spectator*, "The name of Mr. Conrad is new to us but it appears to us as if he might become the Kipling of the Malay Archipelago."

12*th May* 1895 *Champel. Genève*

Dear Garnett

Thanks for your friendly letter. It gave me great pleasure tho' your Highness was pleased to jest, and notwithstanding sombre allusions to "dead lions" which by a fatal association of ideas caused me to think of myself as a "live donkey". Still, being alive is something.—I shall let you know when I come back—but I do not for a moment wish to suggest the propriety of you hiring a few of the unemployed to bestrew the path of my fourwheeler with rushes and thistles.—I wish to return to London incognito. Respect this! (as in the formula of the edicts of that poor dear Emperor of China)

I am working every day:—tolerably bad work. Like poor Risler the Elder's cashier "I haf' no confidence".[1] Some people I have sent the book[2] to wrote very kindly. [3]They seem rather surprised—and I am amused.—

I dread the moment when you shall see my "Outcast" as a whole. It seems frightful bosh. I never felt like that even in the first days of my "Folly".

Meantime I live lazily and digest satisfactorily. At my age that last is important. Do not laugh. Your time will come—Slowly I hope.

I see you have lighted your camp fire in a new place. I shall dwell here for another fortnight.

Yours ever

Conrad

[1] Allusion to Alphonse Daudet's "Fromont jeune et Risler ainé."

[2] *Almayer's Folly.*

[3] Very probably his uncle in Poland and some relatives of his.

Friday, 7th June 95 17 *Gillingham St. S W*

My dear Garnett,

You must think me as faithless as Willems and think of me as hiding the blackness of my soul in epistolary silence.

I came back last Tuesday and called upon the Enlightened Patron of Letters.[1] Meant to call again in Pater-er Bdgs yesterday to see you. I received in the morning an invitation *by wire*!!!!! to dine with the E.P.L. and had to waste all my day to find a man, just to tell him I could not see him. Do you understand the pathos of the situation? I had accepted the electric invitation having forgotten a very good fellow that was coming to smoke with me in the evening. It was easier, then, to put him off than the Patron.

So I have added the festive and hospitable board of "my publisher" to my other experiences—and life seems tolerably complete. What else may I expect? What else that is new? Don't you think, dear Garnett, I had better die? True—there is love. That is always new—or rather startling being generally unexpected and violent—and fleeting. Still one must have some object to hang his affections upon—and I haven't. Oh! the world—since this morning—is one big grey shadow and I am one immense yawn. Do come to the rescue early next week and put some heart into me with your dear, precious brazen flattery. Will you? If so—

[1] Conrad frequently referred to his first publisher, Mr. T. Fisher Unwin, by this name.

please say so. Say when, and I shall try to go to sleep till then.

The Patron has sent me McCarthy's[1] letter. I was as pleased as a dog with two tails till the notion came that it may be the white-bearded one's small joke. Perhaps the venerable man of politics felt frivolous. The letter seems to me at times as weird and unreal as Irving's knighthood. Isn't it funny? The whole thing is so characteristic of the Art, or profession or priesthood—or by whatever name you call play-acting. I have smiled several times. Mr.—Brodribb in the part of Sir Henry Irving! Hang it. Now if that astonishing Lord Rosebery gives a peerage to Sir John Falstaff and makes Bardolph Secretary of State, it will put the finishing touch to the fairy tale of the most misty and elusive administration of this practical country.

I have 6 more chapters for you and the end is not yet.

Yours

J. Conrad

17 *Gillingham St.* [*July* 1895.]

Dear Garnett

Can we meet this week? Any day but Saturday and any time from 6 p.m. And if not this week then let it be the next when all the days belong to me.

I suffer now from an acute attack of faithlessness in

[1] Mr. Justin McCarthy, M.P.

the sense that I do not seem to believe in anything, but I trust that by the time we meet I shall be more like a human being and consequently ready to believe any absurdity—and not only ready but eager.—Perhaps I will be able then to let you see 2 more chapters. I would like you to see them before I write any more. —I have now 400 pages of MS. and the end is not yet!

Still I think that 50 pp more ought to see the end of the coming failure.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

17. *Sep.* 1895 17 *Gillingham Street S.W.*

Dear Garnett

It is my painful duty to inform you of the sad death of Mr Peter Willems late of Rotterdam and Macassar who has been murdered on the 16th inst at 4 p.m. while the sun shone joyously and the barrel organ sang on the pavement the abominable Intermezzo of the ghastly Cavalleria. As soon as I recovered from the shock I busied myself in arranging the affairs of the two inconsolable widows of our late lamented friend and I am glad to say that—with the help of Captain Lingard who took upon himself all the funereal arrangements—everything was decently settled before midnight. You know what strong affection I had for the poor departed so you won't be surprised to hear that to me—since yesterday life seems a blank—a dumb

solitude from which everything—even the shadows—have completely vanished.

Almayer was the last to go, but, before I succeeded in getting rid of him, he made me perfectly wretched with his grumblings about the trouble and expense connected with the sad event and by his unfeeling remarks about the deceased's little failings. He reviled also Mrs. Willems, who was paralysed with grief and behaved more like a cumbersome dummy than a living woman. I am sorry to say he wasn't as sober as he ought to have been in these sad conjunctures and as usual he seemed not aware of anybody's grief and sufferings but his own—which struck me as being mostly imaginary. I was glad to see him go, but—such is the inconsequence of the human heart—no sooner he went than I began to regret bitterly his absence. I had for a moment the idea to rush out and call him back but before I could shake off the languor of my sorrow he was gone beyond recall.

There's nothing more to tell you except that the detailed relation of the heartrending occurrences of the last two days will be deposited tomorrow in Paternoster Bdgs for your persual.

I can write no more! Assured of your precious sympathy I shake tearfully your trusty hand.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Tuesday 1. [*Sept.* 24. 1895.]

Dear Garnett

I got your letter and the MS. about an hour ago and I write at once under the impression of your criticism—of your kind and truly friendly remarks. I want to tell you how much I appreciate your care, the sacrifice of your time, your evident desire to help me. I want to tell you all that, but do not know how to express myself so as to convey to you clearly the sense of the great obligation, of my indebtedness towards you. You gild the pill richly—but the fact remains that the last chapter is simply abominable. Never did I see anything so clearly as the naked hideousness of that thing. I can also see that you do faithfully try to make the best of it with a delicacy of feeling which does honour to your heart however much it may be wrong from an ethical standpoint.

I am glad you like the XXIII chapter. To tell you the honest truth I like it myself. As to the XXIV I feel convinced that the right course would be to destroy it, to scatter its ashes to the four winds of heaven. The only question is: can I?

I am afraid I can't! I lack the courage to set before myself the task of rewriting the thing. It is not—as you say—a matter of correction here and there—a matter of changed words—or lines—or pages. The whole conception seems to me wrong. I seem to have seen the wrong side of the situation. I was always afraid of it.—For months I have been afraid of that

chapter—and now it is written—and the foreboding is realized in a dismal failure.

Nothing now can unmake my mistake. I shall try —but I shall try without faith, because all my work is produced unconsciously (so to speak) and I cannot meddle to any purpose with what is within myself.— I am sure you understand what I mean—It isn't in me to improve what has got itself written.

Still with your help I may try. All the paragraphy marked by you to that effect shall be cut out. For Willems to want to escape from *both* women *is* the very idea. Only—don't you see—I did not feel it so. Shame! The filiation[1] of feelings in Willems on the evening when Aissa speaks to him arises from my view of that man—of the effect produced upon him by the loss of things precious to him coming (the loss) after his passion is appeased. Consequently—his deliberate effort to recall the passion as a last resort, as the last refuge from his regrets, from the obsession of his longing to return whence he came. It's an impulse of thought not of the senses. The senses are done with. Nothing lasts! So with Aissa. Her passion is burnt out too. There is in her that desire to be something for him —to be in his mind, in his heart—to shelter him in her affection—her woman's affection which is simply the ambition to be an important factor in another's life. They both long to have a significance in the order of nature or of society. To me they are typical of man-

[1] A rare example of Conrad's using a French word for lack of an English equivalent.

kind where every individual wishes to assert his power, woman by sentiment, man by achievement of some sort—mostly base. I myself—as you see from this—have been ambitious to make it clear and have failed in that as Willems fails in his effort to throw off the trammels of earth and of heaven.

So much in defence of my view of the case. For the execution I have no word to say. It is very feeble and all the strokes fall beside the mark. Why?—If I knew that—if I knew the causes of my weakness I would destroy them and then produce nothing but colossal masterpieces—which "no fellow could understand". As it is I am too lazy to change my thoughts, my words, my images, and my dreams. Laziness is a sacred thing. It's the sign of our limitations beyond which there is nothing worth having. Nobody is lazy to accomplish things without any effort—and things that can only be attained by effort are not worth having.

In the treatment of the last scenes I wanted to convey the kind of placidity that is caused by extreme surprise. You must not forget that they are all immensely amazed. That's why they are so quiet—(At least I wanted them to be quiet and only managed to make them colourless). That's why I put in the quiet morning—the immobility of surrounding matter emphasized only by the flutter of small birds. Then the sense of their position penetrated the hearts—stirs them —They wake up to the reality. Then comes violence: Joanna's slap in Aissa's face, Aissa's shot—and the end just as he sees the joy of sunshine and of life.

Forgive me this long rigmarole. I wanted you to see what I meant—and this letter itself is a confession of complete failure on my part. I simply could not express myself artistically. It is a small loss to me and I notice that the world rolls on this morning without a hitch.

Once more, thanks. I shall set to at once and grub amongst all these bones. Perhaps! Perhaps!

Yours ever

J. Conrad

P.S.

On Friday at 7. with joy.

1896

Saturday. [*February* 22. 1896]

My dear Garnett

Thanks for your letter. It gave me great pleasure in the expression of your belief; the greater because I went away from our last interview with, somehow, an impression within me that you thought me hopelessly wrong headed. That feeling, taken together with my horrible inability (for the last fortnight) to write a line imbued me with a sense of insecurity. Yet such is the cast iron impudence of my soul, that I was less depressed than you may think by the ominous sounds from without and from within. I can be deaf and blind and an idiot if that is the road to my happiness—but I'm hanged if I can be mute. I will not hold my tongue! What is life worth if one cannot jabber to one heart's content? If one cannot expose one's maimed thoughts at the gate of some cemetery or some palace; and from the disgusted compassion of the virtuous extract the precious penny? for all my talk of anxiety, of care for the future—and such like twaddle—I care very little for the course of events. The unexpected always happens. And if there is no room for one in this world, there is—I suspect—a place for everyone in the shadowy spaces of the next.

Nevertheless I am very grateful to you for your efforts on my behalf.[1] They will not be—in any case—

[1] An effort to obtain Conrad a command of a ship.

wasted: for they have awakened feelings, stirred up sentiments, caused emotions. Caused pleasure, called out hope, gratitude, doubt; shaped uncertainty into amusing outlines—and touched the heart. So, I apprehend, as work of art they are complete and successful—and no mere failure in securing their ends can destroy the fact of a higher success.

I shall turn up on Tuesday at the concert. There's nothing I desire more than to be made known to Mrs Garnett of whom I am unable as yet to think otherwise than as the incomparable translator of an incomparable novelist.[1] An image, that, gracious, inexpressibly interesting and charming but not quite satisfying to the base human nature, the vestiges of which (I am sorry to say) I have not yet been able to cast off utterly! Alas!

I am, dear encourager,

Yours ever

J. Conrad

17 *Gillingham St Wednesday* [*March* 11, 96.]

Dear Garnett.

Please let me know where to find you. I do not know your Rwy station. Also let me know about what time we may put in an appearance on Monday.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

[1] Turgenev.

Monday [*March* 23, 1896.]

Dear Garnett

I am very glad you wrote to me the few lines I have just received. If you spoke as a friend I listened in the same manner—listened and was only a little, a very little dismayed. If one looks at life in its true aspect then everything loses much of its unpleasant importance and the atmosphere becomes cleared of what are only unimportant mists that drift past in imposing shapes. When once the truth is grasped that one's own personality is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown the attainment of serenity is not very far off. Then there remains nothing but the surrender to one's impulses, the fidelity to passing emotions which is perhaps a nearer approach to truth than any other philosophy of life. And why not? If we are "ever becoming—never being" then I would be a fool if I tried to become this thing rather than that; for I know well that I never will be anything. I would rather grasp the solid satisfaction of my wrong-headedness and shake my fist at the idiotic mystery of Heaven.

So much for trifles. As to that other kind of foolishness: my work,[1] there you have driven home the conviction and I *shall* write the sea-story—at once (12 months). It will be on the lines indicated to you. I surrender to the infamous spirit which you have awakened within me and as I want my abasement to

[1] *The Sisters.*

be very complete I am looking for a sensational title. You had better help O Gentle and Murderous Spirit! You have killed my cherished aspiration and now must come along and help to bury the corpse decently. I suggest

THE RESCUER.

A Tale of Narrow Waters.

Meditate for a fortnight and by that time you will get my address and will be able to let me know what your natural aptitude for faithlessness and crime has suggested to you.

My dear Garnett you are a perfect nuisance! Here I sit (with ever so many things to do) and chatter to you (instead of being up and doing) and what's worse I have no inclination to leave off. (Surrender to im pulses—you see) If I was not afraid of your enigmatical (but slightly venomous) smile I would be tempted to say with Lingard: "I am an old fool!" But I don't want to give you an opportunity for one of your beastly hearty approvals. So I won't say that, I will say: "I am a wise old man of the sea"—to you.

Tell Mrs Garnett with my most respectful and friendly regards how grateful I am to her for the kind reception of myself and Jessie. I commend myself to her kind remembrance and look forward to my next visit to your hermitage, with pleasure unalloyed by the fear of boring her to death. I have the utmost confidence in her indulgence—and the goodness of her heart will come to the rescue in the distress of her

mind. As to you I of course do not care what happens to you. If you expire on your own hearthstone out of sheer "ennui" and weariness of spirit it will only serve you right. Goodbye my dear friend.

I am

Yours ever

J. Conrad

9th April, 96

Monsieur J. Conrad
de
chez Mme Coadon. Marche des Granits
à Ile-Grande
par Lannion
(Côtes-du-Nord).

Dear Garnett.

The above rigmarole is my address for the next six months.

I am thirsty and hungry for news from you. Not for anything long—you know—but just for a few lines. Just be for once immorally charitable and drop me a line quick.

Have you got our portraits? Jess has been somewhat unwell for three days but is now all right. She is a very good comrade and no bother at all. As a matter of fact I like to have her with me.

We have got a small house all kitchen downstairs and all bedroom upstairs on as rocky and barren island as the heart of (right thinking) man would wish

to have. And the people! They are dirty and delightful and very Catholic. And most of them are women. The men fish in Iceland, on the Great banks of Newfoundland and devil knows where else. Only a few old old fellows forgotten by the capricious death that dwells upon the sea shuffle about amongst the stones of this sterile land and seem to wonder peevishly at having been left so long alive.

More inland the country is charming and picturesque and unexpected. I like it much!

Tell me what do you think of the title and matter of the story.[1] "The Sisters"[2] are laid aside. Have you seen any notices of the "Outcast." How do they strike you? I had some. They struck me all of a heap so to speak. Ought I to wish myself dead? Or only insane? Or what? Do tell me.

By same mail I write to the Patron! Is he very sick at the very thought of me? Or cocky? Or rampagious? Or fishyti icyty, dummyli indifferent? Does he exist at all? Do you all fellows really exist?—have ever existed? Is London a myth?

We both send our love to you both—and to the hope of the House of Garnett.

Yours ever and everywhere J Conrad

P.S. I have written 15 pages of the dullest trash! . . . immense success!!

[1] *The Rescuer.*

[2] Originally designed as a novel, which I criticized adversely, and Conrad laid aside.

Monday [*April* 13. 1896.]

Dear Garnett.

I am sending you MS.[1] already—if it's only 24 pages. But I must let you see it. I am so afraid of myself, of my likes and dislikes, of my thoughts and of my expression, that I must fly to you for relief—or condemnation—for anything to kill doubt with, for with doubt I cannot live—at least not for long.

Is the thing tolerable? Is the thing readable? Is the damned thing altogether insupportable? Am I mindful enough of your teaching—of your expoundings of the ways of the readers? Am I blessed? Or am I condemned? Or am I totally and utterly a hopeless driveller unworthy even of a curse?

Do tell the truth. I do not mind telling you that I have become such a scoundrel that all your remarks shall be accepted by me without a kick, without a moan, without the most abject of timid whispers! I am ready to cut, slash, erase, destroy, spit, trample, jump, wipe my feet on that MS. at a word from you. Only say where, how, when I have become one of the damned and the lost—I want to get on!

If you can't make out have the thing typed to see how it looks and tell me the cost—or tell Mrs Gill in Ludgate Hill No 35 to send J C's @ to Barr, Moering 72 & 73 Fore Street E.C.—who will pay. Then keep

[1] *The Rescuer.*

this. I have a copy. May I go on in this style? Tell me soon. I trust this will reach you on Thursday.

Remember us to Mrs Garnett

Yours

J C.

April 17th 1896 *Ile-Grande Par Lannion* (*Cotes du Nord*)

Dear Mrs Garnett

We are both much grieved to hear of Edward's illness. These bad tidings, the first bad tidings of any sort which we received since we commenced our lonely life here, touched me very profoundly. I can measure the depth of my friendship and affection for your husband by the painful disturbance of my thought since I have read your letter.

It is very good of you to have written! And I trust you will soon write again. Let me beg you to discard formulas in your intercourse with me. You cannot have much heart or time for long messages. Just only a word or two—literally—and may it be "much better"!

I must demand of you if not in the name of my friendship, then in the name of the interest dear Edward always showed me—thereby conquering my gratitude and affection.

We shall both wait with the greatest impatience for news from the Cearne. I assure you that my wife's concern is very genuine and very great. She sends her best love and best wishes for a rapid recovery.

You are to a certain extent reassuring—but the

news was so unexpected and so painful that I shall wait here, looking at the sea, with heavy heart, till I hear again from you.

Believe me dear Mrs Garnett

Your most faithful and most obedient servant

JOSEPH CONRAD

25th April 96 *Ile Grande*

Dear Mrs Garnett

Your welcome letter brought immense relief—how great you can hardly realize! I am truly grateful to you for sending me the good news.

You have some sore trials to pass through with both the men of your house ill at the same time. I trust the dear little fellow does not suffer much—and will soon get over the tonsilitis. I thought it was a disease of grown people and I am very sorry to hear he is precocious in such an unfortunate manner.

Dear Edward will have—no doubt—to leave London for a time to finish off his convalescence. I wish we had been nearer—and in a less uncivilized place—to beg all three of you to come to us. This sea air here is quite tonic—a rare thing. I am afraid it would be too far to travel for an invalid? But if you ever thought of it!—I would come to St Malo to lead you in triumph to *the* Island. The only island! And after all we manage to live not only decently but pretty comfortably. And I would promise never to speak to Edward of books but

entertain him only with light anecdotes and digestible short riddles—or even keep silent—mute as a fish. No sacrifice would be too great.

My wife rejoices at the news and sends her best love I am dear Mrs Garnett

Your most faithful and obedient servant

JOSEPH CONRAD

Sunday May 24 1896 *Ile Grande*

My dear Garnett.

I swear by all the gods that I haven't had such a sunshiny day since I came here—as to-day. I could not believe my eyes! If you knew how many bitter speculations, hesitating hopes, frightened longings I have known since your wife's last letter! On Friday I could not stand it any more and wrote F. U. asking for news about you. We—Jessie and I—used to spend our evenings in dismal suppositions as to what happened in the Cearne, and came to the ghastly conclusion that you no better, Mrs Garnett had broken down—and the end of the world seemed—to me—somehow within sight. We are both rejoiced! We have danced with loud shouts round your letter. We are hoarse and very tired. I sit down to answer! I haven't anything to say for the moment! There is nothing to say except that I am glad. Glad like a man relieved from rack or thumbscrew—that kind of profound inexprimable satisfaction. Your letter is so cheerful that I feel you must be in the state of real convalescence. I

tell you what. I simply did not dare to write again to your wife. I kept quiet like a man who afraid to start an avalanche keeps deadly still on a narrow ledge—and waits.

It is good of you to think of me—to write to me—and such a long letter too! Don't you read the *Resc*: read nothing but Rabelais—if you must read. But I imagine you so weakened by disease that the bare effort of looking at the page must make you pant. However I trust that Mrs Garnett has some control over your actions—and will with-hold this letter if she thinks it necessary.

Any amount of reviews[1]! Heaps! Its distracting if one could take it all in. But one does not—fortunately. You are the best of invalids to send me the commented *Sat. Rev.* I had seen it! I was puzzled by it but I felt confusedly what you say in your letter. Something brings the impression off—makes its effect. What? It can be nothing but the expression—the arrangement of words, the style—Ergo: the style is not dishonourable. I wrote to the reviewer. I did! And he wrote to me. He did!! And who do you think it is?—He lives in Woking. Guess. Can't tell? I will tell you. It is H. G. Wells. May I be cremated alive like a miserable moth if I suspected it! Anyway he descended from his "Time-Machine" to be kind as he knew how. It explains the review. He dedicates his books to W. Henley—you know.

I have been rather ill. Lots of pain, fever, etc etc.

[1] Of *An Outcast of the Islands.*

The left hand is useless still. This month I have done nothing to the Rescuer.—but I have about 70 pages of the most rotten twaddle. In the intervals of squirming I wrote also a short story of Brittany. Peasant life. I do not know whether its worth anything. My wife typed it and it is in London now with a friend. I shall direct him to send it to you soon. The Patron knows of it. I never know what to write to that man. I want to know (when you are quite well) what you think of it. The title is: *The Idiots.* (10,000 words.)—This is all the news. I've been living in a kind of trance from which I am only waking up now to a sober existence And it appears to me that I will never write anything worth reading. But you have heard all this before. Tonight I shall go to bed with a light heart at last. Do not tire yourself writing. It's enough for me at present to know you are getting on. I shall write tho' whenever the spirit moves me or loneliness becomes insupportable.

Jess sends her love. My affcte regards to Mrs Garnett

Always yours

Jph Conrad

2nd June 1896 *Ile-Grande*

Dear Garnett.

Don't think me an ungrateful beast. I have read your criticism of the first chapter[1] with profound thankfulness and I surrender without the slightest

[1] Of *The Rescuer.*

demur to *all* your remarks. It is easy to do so because they express my own thoughts. Yes! The first page *is* bad. You see, what I wanted to say, is by no means easy and I wrote it out in a perverse mood. But still I think something of the kind ought to be said—more concisely—in other words. As to its not being in tone with the rest it only shows what a many-toned fellow I am. But oh! can't I be bad! Can't I!

Its perfectly rotten, that paragraph, and when one touches it the putrid particles stick to the fingers. I shan't touch it for a while for my gorge rises when I look at it.

As to the "lyrism" in connection with Lingard's heart. That's necessary! The man must be episodically foolish to explain his action. But I don't want the word. I want the idea. Could you help me to shape it in an unobjectionable form. The passage or two marked as superfluous (the coconut etc) ought to be cut out. I know they are not necessary. I don't care for them.

The Patron got hold of my short story.[1] You should not indulge in typhoid fevers discomposing recklessly your friends. I wrote to him instructions to forward it to you. I *would not* have it published unless you see and pass it as fit for the twilight of a popular Magazine.

[1] *The Idiots*. The original typescript of *The Idiots* from which the *Savoy* compositors set up the copy is headed in Conrad's hand, "To be returned to Joseph Conrad, C/o A. P. Krieger, Esq[re], 72-73 Fore Street, London, E.C." The corrections in his hand are not many. The last page (16) of the typescript has been torn away, the last line of page 15 reading: "she had screamed 'Oh! Alive!' and at once vanished before his eyes."

I want to know what you think of it with an absurd intensity of longing that is ridiculous and painful. Often I think of the thing with shame—less often with pleasure—but I think of it every day. And every day the Rescuer crawls a page forward—sometimes with cold despair—at times with hot hope. I have long fits of depression, that in a lunatic asylum would be called madness. I do not know what it is. It springs from nothing. It is ghastly. It lasts an hour or a day: and when it departs it leaves a fear.

Let me know how you get on. Jess is very proud of your reference to her and sends her love to both of you.

I am with the greatest affection always yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

[*June* 6. 1896.]

Dear Garnett

Blessings on your head for the letter with the "Lucas"[1] enclosure. Today I heard from the *Cornhill*. A letter signed by Charles L. Graves writing by desire of the Editor. Asks for short stories—Serials full up to 1899 (I will be dead before then). Short stories at £1.1 per 500 words (that is one page). Very nice letter. Says they are ready to give the most "sympathetic consideration" to anything I may send.

I wrote to F. U. urging him to forward Idiots to you.

[1] I had introduced Conrad to E. V. Lucas, whose account of their first meeting appeared in *English Life*, September 1924.

Have you got them? What do you think? O! My friend speak the truth if you do tear my entrails through my palpitating flank! from you even torture is sweet. It seems to me I am intruding too much into your life. In this matter too, friend, speak to me unveiled words.

As soon as part I of the stupid *Rescuer* is finished I shall send it straight to you. I am gnawing my fingers over the end of it now. If you knew how idiotic the whole thing seems to me you would pity me—You would weep over me. Oh the unutterable, the inevitable Bosh! I feel as if could go and drown myself—in a cesspool at that—for twopence.

I used to have swollen veins in both legs after my return from the Congo. If you hobble now then the initial pain is over. But do refrain from overdoing it in your gambols—as I did then and had to go through the whole fiendish performance "da capo".

Postman waits. We two send our love to you three. Think of me with indulgence.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

10 *June* 1896 *Ile Grande.*

My dear Garnett.

I send you to-day a registered envelope containing all that there is of the Rescuer. It is the whole of the first part. You will see that I have given up dividing it into chapters—formally. I think I had

better divide the thing into parts only. Say five. Then in places—where necessary and proper—a wider interval between the paragraphs will mark the subdivisions of the parts; this arrangement will give me more freedom I think.

I do not know what to think of the pages I am sending you. Mostly they fill me with dismay. But I don't know why they should have this effect. I have been thinking, meditating a great deal, and hoped to have much to say to you in justification of my work. And now I have nothing to say. Cannot find two consecutive sentences in my head.

Will anybody in the world (besides you) have the patience to read such twaddle—I wonder! Will you tell me the truth about it? Here I have used up 103 pages of manuscript to relate the events of 12 hours. I have done it in pursuance of a plan. But is the plan utterly wrong? Is the writing utter bosh? I had some hazy idea that in the first part I would present to the reader the impression of the sea—the ship—the seamen. But I doubt having conveyed anything but the picture of my own folly.—I doubt the sincerity of my own impressions.

Probably no more will be written till I hear from you. If you think I am on a wrong track you shall say so and I may try some other way. Meantime I live with some passing notions of scenes of passion and battle—and don't know how to get there. I dream for hours, hours! over a sentence and even then can't put it together so as to satisfy the cravings of my soul. I

suspect that I am getting through a severe mental illness. Enough of this.

I am ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

Can the *Idiots* be printed without dishonour?

19*th June* 1896 *Ile Grande*

My dear Garnett.

I got your letter to-day. Need I tell you how delighted I am with your approval? The warm commendation is to me so unexpected that if I had not a perfect confidence in your sincerity I would suspect that the despondent tone of my accompanying letter induced you perhaps to force the note of satisfaction with my effort. However, if I don't believe in the book[1] (and I don't somehow) I believe in you—in you as a last refuge: somewhat as an unintelligent and hopeless sinner believes in the infinite mercy on high.

Since I sent you that part Ist (on the eleventh of the month) I have written one page. Just one page. I went about thinking and forgetting—sitting down before the blank page to find that I could not put one sentence together. To be able to think and unable to express is a fine torture. I am undergoing it—without patience. I don't see the end of it. It's very ridiculous and very awful. Now I've got all my people together I don't know what to do with them. The progressive

[1] *The Rescuer.* See Conrad's letter of March 12, 1919.

episodes of the story *will* not emerge from the chaos of my sensations. I feel nothing clearly. And I am frightened when I remember that I have to drag it all out of myself. Other writers have some starting point. Something to catch hold of. They start from an anecdote —from a newspaper paragraph (a book may be suggested by a casual sentence in an old almanack) They lean on dialect—or on tradition—or on history—or on the prejudice or fad of the hour; they trade upon some tie or some conviction of their time—or upon the absence of these things—which they can abuse or praise. But at any rate they know something to begin with—while I don't. I have had some impressions some sensations—in my time:—impressions and sensations of common things. And it's all faded—my very being seems faded and thin like the ghost of a blonde and sentimental woman, haunting romantic ruins pervaded by rats. I am exceedingly miserable. My task appears to me as sensible as lifting the world without that fulcrum which even that conceited ass, Archimedes, admitted to be necessary.

I know the Patron has the *Idiots*. I trust he has sent them to you but I haven't heard from him at all. I did write to the *Cornhill* a suitable answer and informed the Patron of their offer.

Thanks with all my heart for the time, the care, the thoughts you give to me so generously. I am getting so used to your interest in my work that it has become now like a necessity—like a condition of existence. Why don't you tell me how you are? How are the veins

—for I trust that is now the only trouble and I long much to know that it is over.

My affectionate regards to Mrs Garnett. I am ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

I am nearly right. Had a 3 days' cruise along the coast.

10th July Ile Grande par Lannion.

My dear Garnett,

I did not write sooner from (would you guess it?) from a sense of delicacy—was afraid to take up too much of your time in fact! But hang it all, its more than (my) human nature can stand. I must let out a howl upon things in general—which are things that interest me in particular.

I guess (from the aspect of heavenly bodies and from T. Fisher Unwin's letter) that you are tolerably well. Would like to be sure. Have no conscientious objection to post-cards. Am used to hardships and privations of all kinds. Think that 1½ line from you would do me good! Leave you to draw inferences!

Why am I fooling thusly while there is a pain in my back to which a jab with a carving-knife would be a soothing application? I also have just learned that the Cosmopolis refuses my short story[1] (twice) (twice refuses). So say T. F. U. But he also says you are pleased

[1] *The Idiots.*

with it. Is he only gilding the pill? Provisionally I am consoled—but I would like to be sure.

If you have no further use for it please send the 1st part *Resc.* to *G. F. W. Hope 18 Ironmonger Lane. E.C.* I want him to look over the seamanship of my expressions. He is instructed to return it to you. I trust I will live long enough to finish that story but at the pace I am going now I am preparing for myself an interminable old age. I am now setting Beatrix, her husband and Linares (the Spanish gent) on their feet. It's a hell of a job—as Carter would say. However I trust you will find that they stand firmly on their pins when I am done with them. I am trying to make all that short and forcible. I am in a hurry to start and raise the devil generally upon the sea. Jess is not very well but apart from that she is a very good girl. I mention this because I think you might like to know. We send our very best love.

Yours ever

JOSEPH CONRAD

22 *July* 96. *Ile-Grande*

My dear Garnett,

Your letter was like dew on parched grass. I look different to-day. I feel different. I am glad you are taken care of in such an ideal way, but I don't enjoy the news of your stiff legs. And what is that ominous and startling little sentence "Bills rolling in?"—Ah! my dear Garnett God keep us all!

What are you going to write? What? Why hint,

and not explain? If you send me a book let it be your book—one of your books—for I know now the *Imaged World* pretty nearly by heart.

Don't you spoil me! Don't you? After reading your letters I don't touch the ground for three days. Then I get a fall—when I begin to hear myself.

Cosmo asked for a story. I was then writing a story especially for you.[1] I was polishing, perfecting, simplifying. It's finished. I send it to you first of all. It's yours. It shall be the first of a vol. ded. to you—but this story is *meant* for you. I am pleased with it. That's why you shall get it. I am sure you will understand the reason and meaning of every detail, the meaning of them reading novels and the meaning of *Carlier not* having been armed. The story is going by this post. After reading send please to *F. U.* If any passages are —*de trop*—then strike out. I mean it. I don't want anything incompatible with the general method of the thing—but am befogged myself now. Thanks for your hint about the "*Savoy*".[2] I shall wait yet. Don't like to

[1] *An Outpost of Progress.* The original manuscript in Conrad's hand lies before me as I write this note. The inscription on the title page runs: "An Outpost of Progress. To Edward Garnett. 36 pp. 9500 words. 17th-21st July 1896. Ile Grande." But the first page of the story is headed "A Victim of Progress," showing that the final title was only hit upon after the finish. The caligraphy is, even for Conrad, of remarkable beauty, and there are a number of pages almost free from interlineations and cancellings of phrases and lines.

[2] Arthur Symons had written me inviting a contribution to *The Savoy* from the author of *An Outcast of the Islands*; and *The Idiots* appeared there in November 1896.

snatch the thing from the Patron who seems to be trying his best. How is your wife and boy? You don't say. We are so so. There is very little more of Rescuer written. I could not. Misery! Write to us.

Yours ever

JOSEPH CONRAD

I have had a lot of worries. A man I love much had been very unfortunate in affairs and I also lose pretty well all that remained.

Jess sends love to you all.

5th Aug. 96. *Ile Grande. Lannion.*

My dear Garnett

I've sent you 10 days ago a short story[1] which I trust you received all right. It was registered. Since then—that is since I had your last letter—I have been living in a little hell of my own; in a place of torment so subtle and so cruel and so unavoidable that the prospect of theological damnation in the hereafter has no more terrors for me.

It is all about the ghastly "*Rescuer*". Your commendation of part I plunges me simply into despair—because part II *must* be very different in theme if not in treatment and I am afraid this will make the book a strange and repulsive hybrid, fit only to be stoned, jumped upon, defiled and then held up to ridicule as a proof of my ineptitude. You see I must justify—give

[1] *An Outpost of Progress.*

a motive—to my yacht people, the artificial, civilised creatures that are to be brought in contact with the primitive Lingard. I must do that—or have a Clark Russell puppet show which would be worse than starvation. Now the justification that had occurred to me is unfortunately of so subtle a nature that I despair of conveying it in say 20 pages well enough to make it comprehensible. And I also doubt whether it would be acceptable (if conveyed) to a single creature under heaven—not excepting even—especially!—you. Besides I begin to fear that supposing everything conveyed and made acceptable (which seems impossible) supposing that—I begin to fear that I have not enough imagination—not enough power to make anything out of the situation; that I cannot invent an illuminating episode that would set in a clear light the persons and feelings. I am in desperation and I have practically given up the book. Beyond what you have seen I cannot make a step. There is 12 pages written and I sit before them every morning, day after day, for the last 2 months and cannot add a sentence, add a word! I am paralysed by doubt and have just sense enough to feel the agony but am powerless to invent a way out of it. This is sober truth. I had bad moments with the *Outcast* but never anything so ghastly, nothing half so hopeless. When I face that fatal manuscript it seems to me that I have forgotten how to think—worse! how to write. It is as if something in my head had given way to let in a cold grey mist. I knock about blindly in it till I am positively, physically sick—and then I

give up saying—tomorrow! And tomorrow comes—and brings only the renewed and futile agony. I ask myself whether I am breaking up mentally. I am afraid of it.

In desperation I took up another short story. I must do something to live and meantime perhaps a ray of inspiration may come and light me along the labyrinth of incertitude where I am now lost. I wrote the *Outpost of Progress* with pleasure if with difficulty. The one I am writing now I hammer out of myself with difficulty but without pleasure. It is called *the Lagoon*,[1] and is very much Malay indeed. I shall send it to the *Cornhill* straight or else through F. U.—You must be sick of my short stories. And yet they cost me in a sense more than *Outcast* did. I wrote the *Outpost of Prog.* thinking of you. It was during the time when I had not heard from you for nearly six weeks—and you were very much in my thoughts. I made there an effort at conciseness—as far as in me lies—and just managed it short of 10.000 words. Do you find it very bad? I can't bear to look at my MS. of it. Everything seems so abominable stupid. You see *the belief* is not in me —and without the belief—the brazen thick headed, thick skinned immovable belief nothing good can be done. I am worrying you with my jeremiads. Perhaps you are at work! What are you going to write? You

[1] The original typescript of *The Lagoon* from which the *Cornhill* compositors set up the copy is headed, in Conrad's hand, "The Lagoon. Joseph Conrad. Pp. 18. Words 5700. c/o Mr. Fisher Unwin, 11 Paternoster Bdgs. E.C." The author's corrections are relatively few.

stirred my curiosity by the hint that you are going to begin—but what? I dare not ask you to write to me but if you knew how intensely miserable I am you would forgive my intrusions.

We return in October. We must take a labouring cottage somewhere not too far from town. Perhaps I will be able to do something then. But I doubt it. I doubt everything. The only certitude left to me is that I cannot work for the present. I hope you never felt as I feel now and I trust that you will never know what I experience at this very moment. The darkness and the bitterness of it is beyond expression. Poor Jess feels it all, I must be a perfect fiend to live with—but I really don't care who suffers. I have enough of my own trouble.

Yours ever

JOSEPH CONRAD

My wife sends her love.

14*th August* 1896 *Ile Grande*

Dear Garnett

Thanks ever so much for your letter—or rather for your two letters. I suppose you are now in possession of my howl of distress. Perhaps the not unnatural exasperation of a man condemned to read such lamentations has subsided somewhat and you will be able to look at this missive with a—comparatively—kind eye.

You are right in your criticism of *Outpost*. The construction is bad. It is bad because it was a matter of

conscious decision, and I have no discrimination—in artistic sense. Things get themselves written—and you like them. Things get themselves into shape—and they are tolerable. But when *I* want to write—when *I* do consciously try to write or try to construct then my ignorance has full play and the quality of my miserable and benighted intelligence is disclosed to the scandalized gaze of my literary father. This is as it should be. I always told you I was a kind of inspired humbug. Now you know it. Let me assure you that your remarks were a complete disclosure to me. I had not the slightest glimmer of my stupidity. I am now profoundly thankful to find I have enough sense to see the truth of what you say It's very evident that the first 3 pages kill all the interest. And I wrote them of set purpose!! I thought I was achieving artistic simplicity!!!!!!! Now, of course, the thing—the res infecta—is as plain as a pikestaff. It does not improve my opinion of myself and of my prospects. Am I totally lost? Or do the last few pages save the thing from being utterly contemptible? You seem to think so—if I read your most kind and friendly letter aright.

I must explain that that particular story was no more meant for you than the *Idiots*—that is *all* the short stories (*ab initio*) were *meant alike* for a vol. to be inscribed to *you*. Only then I had not heard from you so long that you were naturally constantly in my thoughts. In fact I worried about it thinking of the treachery of disease and so on. And then I thought that the story would be a good title-story—better than

the *Idiots*. It would sound funny a title like this: *Idiots and other Stories*. While *Outpost of Progress and Other Stories* sounds nice and proper. That's why your name has been typed by my devoted wife on the title page of the infamous thing. The question is—is the inf: thing too infamous to go into the vol.—I leave it to you.

Meantime the E. P. of L. has bombarded the *Cosmo.* with it. It appears it will do. At any rate the secretary of the *Cosmo.* accepts and refers to his editor who is away. The price put upon that ghastly masterfolly by the E. P. of L. is £50 which seems to be also agreed to provisionally. I must say that the Patron has behaved generally in a friendly manner which is touching. He writes often and seems to want really to push me along. I will want a lot of pushing I fear.

I've sent a short thing[1] to the *Cornhill*. A malay tells a story to a white man who is spending the night at his hut. It's a tricky thing with the usual forests river—stars—wind sunrise, and so on—and lots of second hand Conradese in it. I would bet a penny they will take it. There is only 6000 words in it so it can't bring in many shekels. . . Don't you think I am a lost soul?—Upon my word I hate every line I write. I wish I could tackle the *Rescuer* again. I simply *can't*! And I live in fear that is worse than mortal. But I have told you all that.

Yours ever

JOSEPH CONRAD

[1] *The Lagoon.*

17 *Gillingham St. London SW* [*September* 1896.]

Dear Garnett

We are here! I feel better since I know myself near you. I have a great tongue-itch. When are you coming up to London?

My wife wishes to get things straight for our cottage. I have ordered her to get everything ready for work there in a week's time. Her efforts are superhuman. I sit still and grumble. Today we go to Stanford to measure room for carpets. Tomorrow I'll be in London and probably budge not till I go and take possession.

When? How? Will you see me. Are you well? Have you time? Have you the wish?

Speak!

Our best love to all of you.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Stanford-le-hope 16*th Oct.* 96

My dear Garnett

Thanks for the book and your letter. It cheers me. By the same post I have received documents from the Patron—to sign. I must tell you about them.

In a letter he points out to me that he has incurred expense on account of securing American copyright of my 3 stories. He strongly insists upon that point. Further on he bespeaks more matter; to complete

60.000 words for a 6/- volume. On serial rights he agrees to pay me *90 per cent* of them as arranged before. So far good.

As to the volume: There are the usual clauses for royalties. The first 2.000 copies bring me in 10% on published price. After *2000 copies* the royalty is to be 12% on pub. price. and after *4000 copies* the royalty is to be 15% on net proceeds of sales. There is the usual clause about thirteen copies going to the dozen.

He wants the work[1] delivered on *March '97* at the latest. He engages himself to publish within *six* months of delivery.

That also is all right. But then he says: on account and in *anticipation* of such royalties the *pub.* shall pay to the *Auth. £25* on *31st Dec '96* and *£25 on 31 March. '97.*

Now I do not think that satisfactory. What do you think? It's exactly what he advanced on the *Outcast.* Ought I not to get more? I want £100 (in two payments if he likes). Can I honestly ask for it? Am I worth that advance?—I shall not write to him *till I hear from you.*

I am glad Smith Elder think of me.[2] I do not see however how I can send my address to them and what would be the use if they think me entirely in the hands of *T. F. U.* I do not want to leave him if he gives me enough to live on. If cornered I would try to escape

[1] *Tales of Unrest.*

[2] Smith Elder and Co., the publishers of *The Cornhill Magazine*, had been putting out "feelers" about Conrad's prospective books.

of course. It's simply a matter of "to be or not to be."

I do hesitate about H. James. Still I think I will send the book. After all it would not be a crime or even an impudence. Excuse me dear Garnett for interminably worrying you with my affairs. You are my "father in letters" and must bear the brunt of that position.

We send our love to you all

Yours ever

JOSEPH CONRAD

Sunday Stanford-le-hope Essex. [*October* 25. 1896.]

Dear Garnett

Thanks for your note on Thursday. I think I will want your advice very much. I've written to F. U. exactly in the terms suggested by you *that is*:
£100 in two payments.
12½% for the first 3000 copies.
15% for everything over 3000 c.
one half american rights.
90% of serial rights.

And I have had yesterday an answer which I literally transcribe.

"——I have read it very carefully and have studied the returned agreement. But I have had to put it away on file. I did not send this agreement without serious consideration—and I must leave my proposal as originally drafted. I have no more to say, except that perhaps I

made a blunder in copyrighting the stories.[1] If at any time you wish to see me, please let me know so that I may be in office and disengaged.

With kind regards sincerely yours"

He is touched by my allusion to the Am. [American] rights—evidently. I had said that: "judging from the idiotic tone of press comments over there I would have thought the Am. rights hardly worth anything. I am glad that you with your great experience of such matters have thought it worth while!!"

To the letter of F. U. I replied in effect: That his "non possumus" seems final to me; for the difference between us is more fundamental than a mere question of "*more and less.*" That his passage about the *blunder* seems to imply that, with ingratitude, I did try to put a screw on him. "A suspicion"—I said—"unworthy of you and me." Then I said: Let me know the extent of my liability towards you so that I can discharge it if possible at once—for till I have done so I do not feel a perfect liberty of action. A position I dislike. That as far as the *Nigger* is concerned I shall try to place it for serial publication with Henley or elsewhere but as to a book I know no one, have written to no one and shall not do so till the *Nigger* is finished. And I asked him to tell me how much he spent on Am. rights as quickly as possible. I ended by saying that I

[1] In the volume *Tales of Unrest.*

do not intend to come to town soon but the first time I did so I would call in a friendly manner etc. etc.

This is a faithful account. I shall not recede from my position an inch. I would rather begin with somebody else. Could you advise me what to do to get these infernal rights taken over by someone. And who? And how to get about it? Is it possible? feasible? And how soon?

The *Idiots* earned some commendation. I begin the Magazine[1] and am very pleased with myself. But Smithers has not sent cheque. I do not appear in the Cornhill for *Nov.* It's a shame. I've had the proof.

Bash the whole business. I am (as the sailors say to express a state of painful destitution) "I am sitting on my bare ass in the lee scuppers" (Burn this letter: it's indecent!) Only it interferes with my *Nigger* damnably. I crawl on with it. It will be about 30.000 words. I must enshrine my old chums in a decent edifice. Seriously do you think it would be too long? There is so many touches necessary for such a picture!

There! My dear Garnett. I have said all—with trust and relief. To you thanks.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

My kindest regards and my wife's love to Mrs Garnett and the boy.

[1] *The Savoy.*

27. *Oct* 1896 *Stanford-le-hope Essex*

My dear Garnett

I am very much touched by your promptitude in writing to cheer me up. You ease my mind greatly—and in this juncture no man could do it but you. I have nothing to do but to follow your advice which is the more easy because it accords with my inclination. I am at your disposition on Friday or any other day only, my dearest fellow, invite those men in my name for I cannot let you stand my business dinners, I can always break your bread (and argue with you impudently while I do so) in the commission of friendship but this is another matter. You will render me an immense service if you will undertake to arrange everything and let me know of the place of feeding. It seems almost an impertinence to ask you to do that but I know you want to help me. On second thoughts perhaps it is better that you should ask them—(I only know Lucas)—but I want you to understand that I *won't* let you pay for it. That's all. Blessings on your head!

Your proposal to introduce me to Longman and also to Heinemann smiles at me. Only I do not want you to give any cause for a grievance to the Patron. I would never forgive myself if I was the cause of any inconvenience to you. Perhaps I am an old donkey to mention this but somehow the idea struck me. Don't be angry!—As to Watt[1] I think I ought to know him.

[1] A. P. Watt, the literary agent.

It would be a great relief to have someone to do one's "dirty work" as the sailors say of any occupation they dislike.

I must tell you that you have sent me an incomplete letter. There are two *full sheets* (8 pages each) and a half sheet which is evidently a P.S.—The last page of the *full sheets* ends "*Don't however commit*" and there is nothing more! Frightful! I have looked everywhere under tables and chairs and can't find the part which tells me what [I] musn't commit. So, I am left in a state of trepidation. It is just possible there was something in the envelope which I have burnt. I did look in however before throwing it on the coals. I assure you I will commit nothing of any kind till I hear from you. The P. has not as yet replied to my farewell letter. I won't yield an inch, for my "dander is riz" (as Bret Harte's men say). Thanks a thousand times. I am dear Garnett ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

My wife sends love

I have sent *Outcast* to H. James with a pretty dedication; it fills the flyleaf.

Sunday. [*November* 1, 1896]

My dear Garnett,

I agree with every word of your letter. Especially about Watt. I shall take care to bring all my MSS. to town. They [are] a beggarly lot anyhow.

My wife is very unwell today so I can't write much

because when she is like that I forget half of what I wish to say. I am letting myself go with the *Nigger*. He grows and grows. I do not think it's wholly bad though. Moreover I must have about 55000 words (in all the 4 stories) to go to a Publisher with; Do you think it's enough.

I had a note from the P. sad and tender and with an autograph P.S. but saying nothing to the purpose. I haven't replied yet.

I am worried and stupidly nervous about imaginary things. That's nothing new.

Yours ever

JPH. CONRAD

Friday. [*Nov.* 6, 1896]

Dearest Garnett.

I have seen Mr. Reginald Smith—who received me like a long expected friend. Seriously, I am very pleased with what I saw of him—and now the P. seems more impossible than ever.

R. S. holds now all my material for consideration—till Friday next—at noon; when I shall come up to hear what he has to say. Mr. Graves—I asked for him at first—was not there. I left my card and thanks for criticism. I feel much easier in my mind—though positively I know nothing of course—but R. S. talked with enthusiasm[1] about my two books which, he

[1] It was Mr. Roger Ingpen, the "reader," who was enthusiastic.

affirms, having read. You are right my dear G. They do look upon me as a kind of "hintfant phenomenon". Something at any rate seems to stir their curiosity. For all the good that may come from this I have you to thank. I kept your advice in mind during the interview. I was dignified and not abjectly modest. We shall see!

Imagine! Two Cambridge dons—Walter Headlam and Dr. Waldstein are so impressed by the *Outcast* (!!!!!!!!) that they wish to make my acquaintance. In fact Headlam through Mrs. Sanderson (my Elstree friend) invites me to Cambridge. I can't accept just now, but later on it may be a curious experience. I have not the slightest conception of what it may be like! What do such fellows think and talk about? I have seen some of Headlam's "po'try" in MS. He—I fancy—is not made in the image of God like other men but is fashioned after the pattern of Walter Pater which, you cannot but admit, is a much greater distinction.

Yours ever

Jph. Conrad

Friday, 13*th Nov.* [1896]. *Stanford-le-hope.*

My dear Garnett.

I have just returned from my interview with Mr. Reginald Smith and, having heard his proposals, seek your advice.

He began the conversation by asking how long it

would take me to finish the *Rescuer*. I replied six months or so. Then he said that—they would make me an offer for it at once but they thought it better for them and *for me* that the offer should be made after the book was finished. He put a stress on that—and I said I "thought so too." It cost me nothing to say that.

Then as to stories. He said they liked them immensely and went on to advise me to put them by for a time. I said I wished to sell them. He replied that they wished to buy them and made the following proposition. He said: We are prepared to give you *at once* £50 for the right to put them away for a time. (He pointed to the safe.) We think it's the best way. When we publish we will give you 20%—and all the American rights—whatever they would fetch. To my demand for a serial publication of the "Nigger" he said in effect that he thought the story too long for the "Cornhill" and generally did not seem to see his way.

Then I spoke about the serial of *Rescuer*. There also he did not say anything definite. Said: We can promise to try but cannot promise success. If you finished the book in six months, we would publish you in September next year—but a serial would delay the publication. I pointed out to him that I did not wish to disappear from the scene for such a long time. And I said I would take a week to consider. He agreed. Adjourned till Friday next.

All this passed in the nicest way imaginable—you must understand. I really believe the people mean well

and would act generously. After all I can't expect more than the offer they made. Nothing would induce me to go back to F. U. Still it worries me to think that my *nigger* would be locked up for a year or two. More likely two. I feel horribly unsettled. It takes the savour out of the work. And the "N" is not yet quite finished. Then to go on toiling over the *Rescuer* without knowing anything about a reward is distasteful. I am somewhat bothered. I dare say shall feel better to-morrow. Would you tell me what you think?

Yours ever

J. Conrad

16*th Nov.* [1896.] 10 *pm.*

Dear Garnett.

I am greatly refreshed by your letter; and, girding my loins, I have written to Smith exactly on the lines indicated by you, a very nice firm letter. I also am sending the press cuttings. And I shall see him on Friday noon—unless he cancels the engagement in consequence of my letter.

To tell you the truth I do not think they will accept my terms. I do not think they care much for me—really. I rather fancy they fancy themselves very generous as it is—to the obscure scribbler. But I am of your opinion entirely. I had better make a stand now and taste the acrid savour of adventure. I do not know how to thank you enough for your encouragement advice and help. I shut up.

I am going to interview the P. on Friday *11 a.m.* Just a call and there is a shadow of an excuse for it too. They have heard of me in Poland, through Chicago (of all the God-forsaken places!) and think of trying for translations of *A.F.* and *O.* So I am unofficially informed by a Warsaw friend. I can talk to the P. about that a little and size him up meanwhile.

The Vienna at 1.30 Friday, when I shall report.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Saturday. [*Nov.* 21. 1896.]

Dearest Garnett.

You are worth ever so many bricks.

It is a lovely arrangement.[1] Remains to be seen whether the story is good enough—or effective enough.

That I doubt. I also remember days when I did not doubt. So I sit tight now; like a man with a lottery ticket; and hope for unheard-of fortunes.

The idea about the P. is very good—like all your ideas. By and bye I shall placate him with a burnt offering of stories. The old Moloch!

The best is that if all fails I can always go back to Smith Elder.—I feel like putting my thumbs in the armholes of my waistcoat.

[1] Mr. Reginald Smith's proposals appearing to be quite unsatisfactory, I went to S. S. Pawling of Heinemann's and interested him in Conrad's work.

I shall make sail with the *Narcissus*[1] and expect to make a quick passage. Weather fine, and wind fair.

Yours ever

Jph. Conrad

Wednesday [*Nov.* 25. 1896.]

Dearest Garnett

I am as you may imagine exceedingly pleased with what Pawling writes. My dear fellow you are the making of me! My only fear is that I will droop with the end of the *Narcissus*. I am horribly dissatisfied with the ideas yet unwritten. Nothing effective suggests itself. It's ghastly. I shall, end [of] this week, send you on a good many pages—but the end is not yet. I think I could almost *pray* for inspiration if I only knew where to turn my face.

Yours ever

J. C.

Sunday. [*Nov.* 29, 1896.]

Dear Garnett.

I send you seventeen pages more—65-82 of my Beloved *Nigger*. Send them on to Mr. Pawling, but first look at them yourself. I am ashamed to think how much of my work you have not seen. It is as if I had broken with my conscience, quarrelled with the inward voice. I do not feel very safe.

[1] *The Nigger of the Narcissus.*

Of course nothing can alter the course of the *Nigger*. Let it be unpopularity; it *must* be. But it seems to me that the thing—precious as it is to me—is trivial enough on the surface to have some charm for the man in the street. As to lack of incident well—it's life. The incomplete joy, the incomplete sorrow, the incomplete rascality or heroism—the incomplete suffering. Events crowd and push and nothing happens. You know what I mean. The opportunities do not last long enough. Unless in a boy's book of adventures. Mine were never finished. They fizzled out before I had a chance to do more than another man would. Tell me what you think of what you see. I am going on. Another 20 pages of type—or even less—will see the end, such as it is. And won't I breathe! Till it's over there's no watch below for me. A sorry business this scribbling. Thanks.

Yours ever

J Conrad

My wife sends her love to all.

(*December* 2. 1896.)

Dearest Garnett.

I have turned to with a will. I do not think I can give the whole on Friday but a good piece off the end I can.

Will you lunch with me on Friday, 1.30, Ang-Am?[1] I shall be there to time and with a handful of paper in

[1] Anglo-American Café.

my pocket. Some of that must be in MS. for I won't let my wife sit up to type. There will be enough to see the last headland anyhow. So I suppose Henley likes it.

Thanks my dear fellow.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Monday morning. [*December* 7. 1896.]

Dear Garnett.

Of course—as old Pendennis used to say —I am *monstrously* pleased to see Pawling, monstrously pleased begad! You are raising for yourself a fine crop of ingratitude—for I don't see any other course of action opened for me.

Shall I meet you at Compton Street? I suppose it is the place where we had dinner together once or twice. At the back of Palace music-hall. If you don't write I shall take it as it being so. It seems an awful thing to sleep in a Museum right alongside fellows who have slept for 2000 years or so, but I am brave. Now I have conquered Henley I ain't 'fraid of the divvle himself. I will drink to the success of the *Rescuer*. I will even get drunk to make it all safe—no morality! I feel like, in old days, when I got a ship and started off in a hurry to cram a lot of shore-going emotions into one short evening before going off into a year's slavery upon the sea. Ah! Tempi passati. There were

then other prejudices to conquer. Same fate in another garb.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

I shall look for you downstairs first. But I will be in Monico's entrance-hall at 5.30 for a vermouth. Won't you call in?

19 *Xer* [*Dec*] 96

Dear Garnett

Ever since I left you in the rain and mud of Oxford Street I have been at work. I had some real bad days but since last Monday I am going on all right. I think the pages just written won't dishonour the book—Your book which you try to coax into bloom with such devotion and care. And the thing is dramatic enough. It will be done by the 7th Jan. Not before!

We are off to Cardiff on Monday. I take my MS. with me. I shall not stop writing unless I am stumped by something, when the only remedy is to wait.

May this next year be a better one to you all than the last! My best wishes go to Cearne if my poor sinful body must go to Wales—that is if Cardiff is in Wales?

I go on then with my work feeling very swimming somehow like a man before a fall. "Absit Omen!" I shall buy chickens, make them sacred, watch the auspices of the sky, the flight of crows—the agitations of planets. Never was ambitious scoundrel of repub-

lican Rome more anxious about the signs of the future. And if I knew of a temple anywhere—of an undesecrated temple within the land—I would go scattering flowers, offer sacrifices, and, prostrate on marble floors at the foot of lofty columns, beseech the gods.

Yours ever

Joseph Conrad

1897

Sunday. Jan. 10. 1897

Dearest Garnett.

Nigger died on the 7th at 6 p.m.; but the ship is not home yet. Expected to arrive tonight and be paid off tomorrow. And the end! I can't eat—I dream—nightmares—and scare my wife. I wish it was over! But I think it will do! It will do!—Mind I only think—not sure. But if I didn't think so I would jump overboard.

Thank you both for your kind letter. I am not so absorbed as not to think of you every day. I think of you captive and desolate within the magic circle of dates.

May the Gods help you. I am all right—have sold myself to the devil. Am proud of it. My wife sends love to all.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Tuesday. 19 *Jan.* 1897. *Stanford-le-hope.*

Dear Garnett.

Thanks for the book, and, before all, thanks for the MS. of *London.*[1] I did not dare to ask. I didn't know whether you cared to let anybody read

[1] A contemplated book on London of a realistic-poetic nature, which the publishers commissioned, and then took fright at. It remains unfinished.

your work in fragments, and, besides, it is a monstrous thing for the children to call their fathers to account—to literary account which is more terrible than a trial for a crime.

I have soaked in the three fragments. I began with *London Bridge*—then the *Lark's song*—and, last, I have read the *Thames' mouth*. And I am proud to see that it is just what I expected in kind—and most delicious in quality. The *Thames* gives me the measure of your quality of observation. The *Bridge* discloses the manner of your seeing, and the *Lark* the far-reaching minuteness of your thought—the masterfulness of your sympathy with life. You do not jump on me. You grow—so to speak—around me. Your sentences luxuriate in your own atmosphere, they spring up on every side—till at last the picture is seen through the crafty tracery of words, like a building through leaves, both distinct—and hidden.

And one is willing to see it so—and not otherwise. Here the straight wall, there the clean line of an angle, the slope of a roof, the arch of a gateway, the fragment of a column. Sentences stand out as ornamented cornices, arabesques catch the sunlight—and there are niches of misty shadow. Both light and gloom are snared in your phrases. They wave before one's eyes in the stir of sentences—and one feels the greatness, the *mistiness* of things amongst which lives a crowd—a crowd mysterious and so terribly simple—ground to dust by the present, and with a future of ashes and dust.

Yes. "Flicker of wind and panic of mist!" It is almost symbolic and ominous coming after the solid impression of the "contest of men interlocked with matter"—the mortal in alliance with the immortal, to make "utility in the gross". It is very good—wonderfully good. "The material . . . gripped moulded . . . by man" and the sudden disclosure in the following sentences that man after all hardly masters and marks its surface while the material grinds, smashes men into chips. I could take it all page by page—not because you have written it—but because it is what it is—and find a train of thought in every three lines. Indeed that suggestiveness is absolutely fatal to the thing as you very well know—surely. The air is too "thick with the amazing advantages of competition" for your prose to ring in it. It is too human too much like a song in a haze. It shall die like the hurrying crowd it describes—but like the crowd it is a fact—a wonderful fact! . . . I must stop, or I would go on for ever. You may believe me I haven't lost one of your epithets, sentences, lines. The apostrophe to London is splendid. But then! . . .

I have been in bed two days. A cheap price for finishing that story. Haven't heard from Pawling yet. I send you back the *Bridge* * * * keep the other two another twenty-four hours. Shall write again then.

* * * kind regards to Mrs. Garnett. Jess sends her love.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Thursday. [*January* 21. 1897]

Dear Garnett.

I was glad to hear from you. Thanks ever so much for the books which I fear will be wasted upon me. You know how rebellious I am to verse. It's like a curse laid on me. I send back the two other fragments—and I would write at length about them but my wife is laid up and consequently I am unable to think; for her neuralgia distracts me more than it does herself.

Why do you speak of "extenuating circumstances". I did not look for an excuse for you. I love such criminals—and I would rather rob a man of a last shred of honour—than take any of your guilt from you. As a matter of fact the more I look at your pages the more I cherish your misdeeds. I wish I could sin in such a way. I have brought upstairs yesterday "*The Imaged World*" and have been looking through it. I haven't seen it for at least a month. And now I see plainly many things in it: amongst others, that you are incorrigible. And I would sooner see you hanged (by Philistines) than reformed. That's the whole truth. It may not be friendly to say so but at any rate it is not the villainy of concealment. The *Lark is* a chapter! It is a most poetical idea—a strangely complete vision —expressed with continuous felicity of phrase. That's what it is! I envy your writing—the singleminded expression, without a thought for the deaf and blind of the world. And when I remember that while you were

looking at *The Thames* while you were drinking in the impressions that are now before me expressed on paper —I was bothering you with my chatter, I feel I have forfeited my right to live—that I owe my existence to your magnanimity alone. But I do not for all that forswear my chatter. Here are four pages of it already!— I can't send the *Nigger*. It's too illegible! I haven't heard yet from S. P. but suppose it's all right anyhow. He seemed so positive when I saw him. I've sent him a suggestion for a title. What do you think of it?

Yours ever

J. Conrad

THE FORECASTLE.

A Tale of Ship and Men.

How [will] this do? It's rather late to ask your opinion for I've already sent a slip to P. I really daren't inflict on you my MS. Will you send me some more of yours? Don't think me cheeky. I would like to see it.

[*January* 26. 1897]

Dear Garnett.

I have made the MS. just a little clearer and send it to you—the last fifty pages. It is still ghastly but I haven't energy enough to copy them for you. If too difficult do not read. I had a letter from Pawling. It appears from it that the final decision as

to serial publication would be taken at some meeting (of directors I suppose) on Monday (yesterday). I haven't heard any more and am anxious. I do nothing yet. Take it easy and so on. But am collapsed for a time. I will let you know as soon as I know my fate.

Ever yours

Jph. Conrad

Do you know of anybody who could introduce me to the London Library. A member is necessary. I enclose form.

P.S. In the list of members I see *Lucas* (*Edward Verrall*), 21. Bisham Gardens, Highgate. Is he the Lucas I've seen and who writes for the *Cornhill*? If so perhaps you could ask him to sign that form.

Sunday. [*Feb.* 7. 1897]

My dear Garnett.

Thanks for the book and your letter. I do not know whether I am to be sorry or to rejoice at your publishers shying from your *London*. It is a damnable thing in one sense and glorious in another. I envy you almost in a way you may imagine a scoundrel envying the serenity of honourable power. But it is obvious that dishonesty (of the right kind) is the best policy; and henceforth my concern shall be to discover and steadfastly pursue a dishonest and profitable course. With characteristic cynicism I inform you that I shall seek illumination in your misfortunes—and

advice from your sophisticated mind—which, incapable as it is to serve (and distort) your pure art, can yet direct and mould my deliberate and conscienceless villany. The fate of *the Lark—The Bridge—The River* —and of many other admirable chapters which I haven't seen shall be a lesson to me—a lesson in the virtues of shallowness, imbecility, hypocrisy—as instruments of success.

I enclose here a note from Pawling—who is a good fellow. I am glad I kept quiet and refrained from worrying him. I feel very safe in his hands—and I wrote a line to tell him so.

I am thinking of a short story.[1] Something like the Lagoon but with less description. A Malay thing. It will be easy and may bring a few pence. I shall send it to Unwin; ask him to place it (on 10% Com) and look upon it as a further contribution to the Vol. of short stories that is to come in the far future. The *Rescuer* sleeps yet the sleep like of death. Will there be a miracle and a resurrection? Quien sabe!

My wife sends her affectionate regards.

Ever yours

Jph. Conrad

13*th Febr.* [1897]

Dear Garnett.

I had this morning a charming surprise in the shape of the *Spoils of Poynton* sent me by H. James with a very characteristic and friendly inscrip-

[1] *Karain.*

tion on the fly leaf. I need not tell you how pleased I am. I have already read the book. It is as good as anything of his—almost—a story of love and wrongheadedness revolving round a houseful of artistic furniture. It's Henry James and nothing but Henry James. The delicacy and tenuity of the thing are amazing. It is like a great sheet of plate glass—you don't know it's there till you run against it. Of course I do not mean to say it is anything as gross as plate glass. It's only as *pellucid* as clean plate-glass. The only fault I find is its length. It's just a trifle too long. Personally I don't complain as you may imagine, but I imagine with pain the man in the street trying to read it! And my common humanity revolts at the evoked image of his suffering. One could almost see the globular lobes of his brain painfully revolving and crushing mangling the delicate thing. As to his exasperation it is a thing impossible to imagine and too horrid to contemplate.

I send you some thirty pages of MS. I am heartily ashamed of them and am afraid that this instinct of shame is right. I feel more of a humbug than ever—and yet I lay my shame bare to you because you wish it. My wife is this moment reading reverently James' book, and trying honestly to distinguish its head from its tail. Her reverence is not affected. It is a perfectly genuine sentiment inspired by me; but her interest is, I suspect, affected for the purpose of giving me pleasure. And she will read every line! 'Pon my word it's most touching and only women are capable of such

delicately penetrating sacrifices. I do nothing but yawn and tear my hair.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Tuesday. [*Feb.* 16. 1897]

My dear Garnett.

I was glad to get your letter. Thanks ever so much for your kind invitation. As a matter of fact we do move in on the 12th by special arrangement —but we both are so anxious to accept your invitation that even had we intended to move on the fifth we would have put off the dismal ceremony. So if Jess (who sends her love) is well we shall see you on the proposed date. I shall be in the Mecca on Thursday between 2.30 and 3. Call in if you have time and are not afraid of being bored. My affectionate regards.

Yours ever,

Jph. Conrad

Friday. [*February* 19. 1897]

Dear Garnett.

I wrote to my literary! friend[1] saying that you promised to give quick attention to his stories. Their title is:

From the Four Corners,

his pseudonym I do not know, and he is going to send them (probably early tomorrow) in the usual way.

[1] John Galsworthy.

You have cheered me immensely yesterday— You were so much better than my expectations and from you I always expect more than a little you know!

I had a note from James. Wants me to lunch with him on Thursday next—so there is something to live for—at last! He is quite playful about it. Says we shall be alone—no one to separate us if we quarrel. It's the most delicate flattery I've ever been victim to.

I shall try to begin that short story to-day. My heart is in my boots when I look at the white sheets. Offer up a short prayer for me.

Ever yours

J Conrad

28th February '97.

Dearest G.

Ecco là! I deliver my misguided soul into your hands. Be merciful. I want you, besides as much criticism as you have time and inclination for, to tell me whether the thing[1] is printable. Think of your reputation as well as mine—for once your name appears on the fly leaf on any book of mine you shall be associated in my downfall. People'll say you've patronised an ass. Reflect—Reflect.

And understand well this: If you say "Burn!" I will burn—and won't hate you. But if you say: "Correct—Alter!" I won't do it—but shall hate you henceforth and for ever! Till then

Ever yours

J. Conrad

[1] *Karain.*

10*th March* '97.

My dear Garnett.

I write according to promise and Hope shall take the letter to town tomorrow. I have been at *Karain* and have rewritten all you had seen. A painful task. Strangely, though I always recognised the justness of your criticism it is only this evening after I had finished the horrid job that the full comprehension of what you objected to came to me like a flash of light into a dark cavern. It came and went, but it left me informed with such knowledge as comes of a short vision. The best kind of knowledge because the most akin to revelation.

I have thought of You much. Somehow you have intruded into many moments of my life. You have appeared between lines of print, in the red glow of coals—and in other incongruous places. And I still think that there were several shades of truth in all the impertinences of my talk with you and about you. I think your mission is to work *for* art—and I know you will work artistically for art—for the very essence of it.

—I haven't heard from Pawling up to now. Could you call? But not from me—I think. See how things shape themselves. I am afraid I may be compelled to ask him to advance me a little cash—say £25. What do you think? There is a blessed old kite which I flew a couple of years ago—and it is coming to roost at the end of this month. Hope—poor devil—is so damnably hard up that I can't call him to the rescue. And if P.

would do it it would be very convenient. But it isn't strictly speaking a matter of life and death. I wouldn't do anything to shock him—you know.

Write me what you hear. Do not fear to deal a blow. My respectful regards to Mrs. Garnett. Jess sends her love.

Ever yours

JPH. CONRAD

Stanford-le-hope,
Essex.

Friday. 12*th March.* [1897]

My dear Garnett.

I don't know how to thank you for your exertions. And in fact I won't thank you. You have done enough to earn the blackest ingratitude and you shall not be disappointed of your reward.

I haven't got the cheque (how pretty the word looks!) but I shall no doubt receive it tonight or to-morrow. I do not distrust Pawling as you may well imagine. The man who can't appreciate the perversity of the *Spoils of P.* must redeem himself by the most rectilinear truthfulness. I must say, though, I don't exactly understand my position vis-a-vis of the *N.R.* Is it a question of "to be or not to be" or the more gross question of time only? To tell you the truth, now Henley has accepted me I don't care much whether I appear or not in the *N.R.* Or at least care only for the additional cash it may bring. Otherwise I would like

to appear at once in book form and be done with it. It would settle doubts and if it kills hope it would also kill incertitude.

I don't understand the infernal farrago you write about yourself. About your inability to express yourself etc. etc. I can't lay my hands on the letter to quote—everything is upside down (sailors say: ass upwards) round me here as we shift camp at 7 a.m. tomorrow. But if you mean to say that you do not make yourself understood by me it's an odious libel on both of us. Where do you think the illumination—the short and vivid flash of which I have been boasting to you came from? Why! From your words, words, words. They exploded like stored powder barrels—while another man's words would have fizzed out in speaking and left darkness unrelieved by a forgotten spurt of futile sparks. An explosion is the most lasting thing in the universe. It leaves disorder, remembrance, room to move, a clear space. Ask your Nihilist friends. But I am afraid you haven't blown me to pieces. I am afraid I am like the Russian governmental system. It will take a good many bursting charges to make me change my ways. I trust you will persevere, for I feel horribly the oppression of my individuality. I am going on with *Karain*—and going wrong no doubt!—I'll write soon again. Meantime think tenderly—act brutally—dream sweetly.

Ever yours

Jph. Conrad

Wednesday. [*March* 24. 1897] *Stanford-le-hope.*

Dearest Garnett.

I am ashamed of not having written directly I had Pawling's letter. It's that infernal story.[1] I can't shake myself free of it, though I don't like it—never shall! But I can get rid of it only by finishing it coûte-que-coûte.

Pawling wrote a very friendly letter but nothing explicit. I have still no idea when I am likely to come out. The cheque for £30 was the only solid fact in the envelope. And after all no man can ask for more.

Do think of your work. You are the man to think about it. If I venture in the fulness of my affection to expect something from you—you know better what I want than any man alive. See, then, that I get it. Bleed, sweat, writhe, groan, weep, curse. It's no concern of mine. I care too much for you to count your anguish anything but a trifle. I want your very life. Ever yours, Jph. Conrad.

Jess sends her love.

Sorry can't come to town. Can't you come here? Think of some *near* date. For a few days if you could stand it. Is such felicity not for the likes of me?

[1] *Karain.*

14 *Ap.* 97.

My dear Garnett

Karain gone to Unwin today. In the letter I ask *U.* to give the story to you before sending out amongst editors. I ask you to read it specially because it is your advice that had reshaped it and made it what it is—in good. I have not got rid of *all* the bad (in the first 15 pages) but I am nevertheless grateful to you for putting me on the right track. I worked rather hard. Been seedy. How are you all? Jess sends love.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

If you can find out *where* they are going to send it at first tell me.

Tuesday. [*April* 20. 1897.] *Stanford-le-hope.*

Dearest Garnett.

The last few lines of your letter saddened me,[1] for if the smallest world is the safest from pain yet it is painful to me to learn the manner in which you take account of your wealth. Wisdom says: do not fill the vacated place—never! This is the only way to a life with phantoms who never perish; who never abandon one; who are always near and depart only

[1] This refers to the tragic death of a friend, Eustace Hartley, who was the life and heart of the circle of many friends he had gathered round him.

when it is time also for yourself to go. I can tell for I have lived during many days with the faithful dead.

I suggest it with diffidence—but perhaps it would not be a jar and perhaps it might be soothing for you to come here for a few days (as many as you like). You need not open your lips for days if you like; you may look at unfamiliar scenery—walk on strange paths. No one shall intrude upon your thoughts unless you consent to the intrusion. That much I can guarantee. We cannot, unfortunately, ask you both—or you three—at the same time owing to as yet deficient accommodation; but perhaps Mrs. Garnett and Bunny would come when the weather is more settled. As to you, if you feel in the least like it just drop me a line the day before so that I can meet the train. This is all said with diffidence.

Jess sends her love. She is very anxious you should come.

Thanks for all you say about the story. If it is tolerable it is only because you have recalled me to a tolerable mood. I will not now try to explain what chaotic impulses guided me in writing—but as I wrote I tried to remember what you said. My dear fellow you keep me straight in my work and when it is done you still direct its destinies![1] And it seems to me that if you ceased to do either life itself would cease. For me you are the reality outside, the expressed thought,

[1] I had told Conrad that *Karain* would surely suit *Blackwood's Magazine*.

the living voice! And without you I would think myself alone in an empty universe.

Ever yours,

Jph. Conrad

[*May* 26. 1897]

My dear Garnett,

I do not know how to thank you for your letter about the *Nigger*. It has made me happy and very proud. And I am glad that your name shall be inscribed on something you like.

I saw Pawling yesterday and he was very friendly. He comes for a sail on the 12th June. I trust we shall see you here before that time. I do want to hear you talk and I also want to ventilate my naive ideas.

Marius [1] came this morning and I am licking my chops in anticipation. Do come soon. Jess sends her love to you all.

Yours ever

Jph. Conrad

2d *June* '97.

Dear Garnett,

Wife has not been well, but is better now —much. I did send the 1st part of *Rescuer* to Pawling who seems *very* pleased with it. He is an excellent fellow and you are a super-excellent one to have introduced me to him. Of course I have not written much

[1] I had sent Conrad *Marius the Epicurean.*

while Jess was in bed, being busy nursing and so on. I *must* go on now with the *Return*—then shall jump upon the *Rescuer*. The *Nigger* is bought in the States by the Batchelor Syndicate for serial and by Appleton for book. I begin in the August Number of the New R. (26th July).

Jess sends her love to you both. When are you coming. [I can't ask] you same time with Pawling on account of sleeping accommodation. He comes on the 11th-12th. Can't you come this week? I shan't go in the boat[1] this Whitsuntide.

Ever yours

Jph. Conrad

Friday [*June* 11. 1897]

My very dear Garnett,

You are a brick to send me your wife's admirable translation of Prose poems.[2] Won't I have a real good time with them tonight!

I trust you are well. I am so so—horribly irritable and muddle-headed. Thinking of *Rescuer*; writing nothing; often restraining tears; never restraining curses. At times thinking the world *has* come to an end—at others convinced that it has not yet come out of chaos. But generally I feel like the impenitent thief

[1] Conrad shared a sailing-boat with his friend Hope on the Thames near Stanford-le-Hope.

[2] *Dream Tales and Prose Poems.* By Ivan Turgenev. Translated by Constance Garnett. Heinemann, 1897.

on the cross (he is one of my early heroes)—defiant and bitter.

Pawling comes to-day. Wish could have had you here. Mind you come soon. Jess sends her love to you. both. She has been seedy. My kindest regards to Mrs Garnett and love to the boy.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

18*th July*. '97 *Stanford-le-hope.*

My dear Garnett,

I suppose that after reading this you will think that "the kindness of Providence for an undeserving reptile has reached a point where it is open to criticism" (Mark Twain).

The facts are these: After I saw you off that day I turned to tramp home and got halfway there when my Private Devil got into me. This P. D. suggested the refusing of Blackwood's offer and argued with me all the morning. He ended by convincing me—as you might expect—so I wrote to the Patron that £40 was my price for *Karain* and nothing less would do. The truth is that my P. D. wanted to annoy the Patron who advised me to accept the Scotch offer. This is the secret of my P. D.'s activity.

Yesterday the Patron forwarded me a letter from B'wood's which says that they accept my terms on the understanding that I shall give them the refusal of any short story I may write. As soon as I recovered from the shock I wrote saying I would be most happy to

agree if Messrs. Blackwood undertake to decide upon the MSS. within a fortnight from reception and in case of acceptance print within four months. This is a distinct good turn in my affairs—and like everything else good I owe it to you—for did not you advise to try Blackwood? I hope you won't be angry with my cheek. Success justifies the means—dont you know.

Jess was very crestfallen to find you gone and scolded me for not wiring her on Sat. to come back at once. I assured her of your complete forgiveness—was I right? I go on groping through the *Return.* I feel helpless. That thing has bewitched me. I can't leave it off.

Ever yours

JPH. CONRAD

I shall send *Educ. Sentimentale* on Tuesday. Remember me to your wife. I did not know she translated Tolstoi. I shall get it at once from the L.L.

11, *Paternoster Buildings London, E.C* [*August* 1897]

My dear Garnett,

Do not think me a beast. I have been so very idle and unsettled that I could not find time to send you a line—much less to correct the MS.—the next in turn for you to see. Today I go home and shall not come to town till my last short story is finished. I'll then bring it to you in the City.

Till then always and ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

Tuesday. [*August* 24. 1897]

Dearest Garnett,

I am so glad you wrote. You gave me tone. I've been a martyr to various worries and can't send you the *Return* yet. I send you however something else: a short preface to the *Nigger*.

I want you not to be impatient with it and if you think it at all possible to give it a chance to get printed. That rests entirely with you. *Imprimis.* the *Nigger* is *your* book and besides you know very well I daren't make any move without your leave. I've no more judgment of what is fitting in the way of literature than a cow. And you must be the Lord of that one head of cattle (Ain't I rural in my images? The farm tells. Eh?)

And let me hear the decree soon to ease my mind. On my eyes be it—I shall not draw one breath till your sublime Highness has spoken to the least of his slaves. We demand mercy.

Cunninghame Graham has not been. We exchanged a few letters. Tell you all about it when we meet. God be with you brother.

Jess sends her love.

Ever yours

Jph. Conrad

1897. 28*th Aug*st. *Stanhope-le-hope, Essex.*

Dearest Garnett.

Thanks many many times for your sympathetic and wise letter. I put sympathy first—the gift —the unchanging thing—the most precious to me.

But as to your wisdom I am ready to admit without discussion that it surpasses the sagacity of the most venomous serpents.

As you may imagine I do not care a fraction of a damn for the passage you have struck out[1]—that is, the personal part. But I think that the eight lines at the end (of the paragraph struck out) conveying the opinion that in "art alone there is a meaning in endeavour as apart from success" should be worked in somehow. And whether your wisdom lets me keep them in or not I tell you plainly—fangs or no fangs—that there is the saving truth—the truth that saves most of us from eternal damnation. There!

I shall promptly patch the hole you have made and show you the thing with the infamous taint out of it. ——If then, there is the slightest chance of it doing some good to the *Nigger* it shall *not* go to the Saturday or any other Review. Hang the filthy lucre. I would do any mortal thing for Jimmy—you know.

I have a bit of news which I am bursting with. The other day I wrote to Blackwood's asking them to send me proofs early and so on—just to give them my address. Yesterday I had a charming, friendly letter from Wm. Blackwood saying he would have the story set up on purpose and at once—asking me whether I would mind the story[2] coming out in November instead of October, but leaving it to me—and so on in that unheard of tone. At the end he asks me whether

[1] In the Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus.*

[2] *Karain.*

I have a long story "on the stocks" and wishes to know whether there is enough of it for him to see with a view to running it as a serial in the magazine. Imagine my satisfaction! I answered in a befitting manner and by-and-bye shall let him have the *Rescue*. All the good moments—the real good ones in my new life I owe to you—and I say it without a pang; which is also something of which you may boast, O! Wiser than the serpents. You sent me to Pawling—you sent me to Blackwoods—when are you going to send me to heaven? I am anxious to depart soon so as not to be too late for the next batch of immortals—but I don't care to go without an introduction from you. May your days be steeped in serenity and your visions be only of sevenfold Perfection.

Yours ever

Jph. Conrad

24th Sept. [1897] *Friday*

Dear Garnett.

The Return being accomplished in about 23-000 steps it is natural that I should ask you to come and kick it back again whence it came. The fact is my dear fellow your criticism, even when most destructive, is so shamelessly adulatory that I simply *can't live* without it. As a matter of fact it's about all I have to live upon. Please consider!

Seriously. Am I to send it to you? Are you at leisure and have you the disposition? How nicer it would be if you could come. Say—on Thursday—or

rather on any day after Monday. Eh?—I suppose tho' no such luck. Still—do give a sign of life, so that I know where to pursue you.

I've asked Pawling to send me a copy of the *Nigger* in paper cover—of the copyright issue—you know. They aren't for sale. I thought I would ask you whether you would offer it to your mother who has so kindly consented to be misguided into enthusiasm—by her undutiful son. It would not be the common edition at any rate—and I shall not have any copies "de luxe" to distribute.

What have you been doing? I do want a real talk with you. And now this infernal *Return* is off my mind we must, we must meet.

Ever yours

Joseph Conrad

1897. 27*th Sept. Stanford-le-hope, Essex.*

My dear Garnett.

I was so sure you would write on Sunday that I did send to the P. O. this evening on purpose to fetch your letter. I knew it would be there. And I always—always, want to hear from you.

When I wrote to Blackwood I did say exactly what you suggest in your letter. I said that I was under obligation to Wm. Heinemann and that the *book* was theirs. My correspondence with Blackwood is very friendly. He sent me proofs "of your excellent story" begging me to do whatever I wanted in the way of cor-

recting "as 'Maga' does not mind the expense of corrections" and so on. Since I sent the *Rescue* (that's the new title) I had a letter from *the firm* saying that Mr. William Blackwood was ill, but would read the story and write to me as soon as he got better. I wrote expressing regrets at the news and asking him to take his time over it. I haven't heard since.

I've also exchanged a couple of very friendly letters with Pawling. He is a good fellow. The *N. of the N.* comes out in November sure. P. wrote a personal letter to Scribner offering the *N of the N.* The book is being set up. I've sent him a fair copy of the preface with the personal paragraph taken out as marked by you. It is quite long enough without it. It is certainly much better as expurgated by you. I told P. you said it would do no harm to the book; I also asked him to read it and give me his opinion—from the Public point of view. In the same letter I asked him for the second time to send me the copyright vol. Had no reply yet—of course.

The *Return* completes the Vol. of short stories promised to Unwin. The promise is mine and I would not go back on it. Together it'll be 63000 words. Five stories. I've been casting about for a title—for the whole. I thought of:

Tales of Unrest.

What do you think?

—When I parted with Unwin I said:—you shan't have the *Nigger*—but as you've copyrighted in America

for me you shall have other stories to make up a vol. I won't touch the American rights—whatever they are. Otherwise you shall have the stories on your own terms.

Now, his terms, roughly, were: £50 down, and 10% progressing to 15%. I shall propose: £60 down, in two payments one in January of £30—the other half on publication. Percentages as he likes (Pawling gives me 15% and 20%). Half translation rights. Can I ask for these terms. Is it fair to F.U.?

I fancy, if the *Nigger* hits, he will make a good thing out of the vol. on such terms. If the *Nigger don't hit* then nothing matters much to me and *he* would pull a long face at anything—at a gift—at a premium—anything!

———

The *Nigger* according to sample sent me by P. makes up to 288 pages. The preface another five or six—if not more. I think it can come out at 6/. (My royalties are on *published price throughout.*)

Ain't I a sordidly vile old man? At times I am myself amazed at my impudent desire to be able to live. And at times I feel sick—sick at heart with doubts, with a gnawing unbelief in myself. It's awful!

The *Return*! And you—you are jealous! Of what? The subject is yours as much as ever it has been. The work is vile—or else good. I don't know. I can't know. But I swear to you that I won't alter a line—a word—not a comma—for you. There! And this for the reason that I have a physical horror of that story. I simply

won't look at it any more. It has embittered five months of my life. I hate it.

Now, as to selling the odious thing. It has 23000 words—who would take it? It won't stand dividing—absolutely not. Shall I give it to Unwin to place? What Mag. would you advise? *Yellow Book* or Chapman—perhaps. Eh?

It is not quite typed yet. I shall send it off *to you first* either tomorrow evening (this letter goes at noon) or Wednesday noon—to the Cearne. I don't think I'll be in town this week. Come as soon as you can. I am full of things which I want to disgorge.

Ever yours

Jph. Conrad

Jess sends her love to both of you. Perceive that you are still "the best man in the world" a position that of right should belong to me. But women are queer—and wives still more so. (This in confidence.)

Wednesday [*Sept* 29. 1897.]

Dearest Garnett,

I don't know whether to weep or to laugh at your letter. I have already torn out several handfuls of hair. And there seems nothing else left to do.

I am hoist with my own petard. My dear fellow what I aimed at was just to produce the effect of cold water in every one of my man's[1] speeches. I swear to you that was my intention. I wanted to produce the

[1] The hero of *The Return*.

effect of insincerity, of artificiality. Yes! I wanted the reader to *see him think* and then to hear him speak—and shudder. The whole point of the joke is there. I wanted the truth to be first dimly seen through the fabulous untruth of that man's convictions—of his idea of life—and then to make its way out with a rush at the end. But if I have to explain that to you—to you!—then I've egregiously failed. I've tried with all my might to avoid just these trivialities of rage and distraction which you judge necessary to the truth of the picture. I counted it a virtue, and lo and behold! You say it is sin. Well! Never more! It is evident that my fate is to be descriptive and descriptive only. There are things I *must* leave alone.

This thing however *is*. (the MS. has not yet arrived) And the question presents itself: is it to be put away in an unhonoured grave or sent into the world? To tell you the truth I haven't the courage to alter it. It seems to me, if I do, it will become so utterly something else something I did not mean. What strange illusions we scribblers have! Probably the thing means nothing anyhow.

Can it be placed as it is in some Mag? Perhaps before the book comes out I shall see the true daylight from somewhere and then—and then! I must talk it over with you. I do not want to defend it. I want only to thoroughly understand. Thanks many times. Write when you can.

Ever yours

Joseph Conrad

8th Oct 1897

Best of Men!

How horribly tired of me you must be. Yes. I begin to see—just to see a glimmer. My dearest fellow I am too obtuse for one letter to convince me. But my feelings are fine enough for me to be horrified at the thought of all the time you are wasting upon my unworthy person. Do you know I am at times in the frightful situation of thinking that you are absolutely right in your blame and—oh horrors!—utterly wrong in your praise. That there is not a single redeeming line in the story!![1] I can't look at it. It torments me like a memory of a bad action which you—friend—are trying paliate. In vain. I am a prey to remorse. I should not have written that thing. It's criminal.

I'm sending it to Chapman to-day.

Yes—I see. I am unreal even when I try for reality, so when I don't try I must be exasperating. I feel like a man who can't move, in a dream. To move is vital—it's salvation—and I can't! I feel what you mean and I am utterly powerless to imagine anything else. It's like being bewitched; it's like being in a cataleptic trance. You hear people weeping over you, making ready to bury you—and you can't give a sign of life!—I wish to goodness I could *not* believe you. But I can't.

[1] *The Return.* In the Author's Note to *Tales of Unrest*, Collected Edition, 1919. Conrad says: "Indeed my innermost feeling now is that *The Return* is a left-handed production. . . . I know how much the writing of that fantasy has cost me in sheer toil, in temper, and in disillusion."

I *feel* all you say and all the same I remain in the dark as though you had spoken an impassioned discourse—in Chinese. I feel—and I can't understand. I am stirred—and I can't grasp my own emotion. It is too awful—without joking.

Perhaps in time—perhaps in time! Who knows? If you don't abandon me in disgust I may yet learn the truth of art—which you possess. Even now I have an imperfect apprehension—for that story has been a heavy trial to me while I was writing it. It has made me ill: I hated while I wrote.

Thanks. Thanks. I must—for a while—think of other things. I can't send you the MS.[1] pages because you *could not* find yourself in them. I can't myself—now. There are heaps of them; whole pages of erasures with perhaps one solitary and surviving line hiding amongst the ranges of scored out words.

When the T.S.[2] returns from C. & H. as I feel it will I shall send it to you. I would like your wife to read it. I would like—I have much courage—I would like to know what she thinks.

Blackwood don't give a sign of life about the *Rescue*. A new serial begins in Oct. It may run six months perhaps. It would give me time to finish mine.

I don't think I will ever write anything more. That shall wear off, but meantime I can't write a word of the *Rescue*.

I want to make it a kind of glorified book for boys—you know. No analysis. No damned mouthing. Pic-

[1] *The Rescue.* [2] The typescript of *The Return.*

tures—pictures—pictures. That's what I want to do. And I can do that. Can't I?

I'm going to pull myself together. Shall write you soon. With greatest affection.

Ever yours

Joseph Conrad

Monday evening Stanford-le-Hope Essex [*October* 11. 1897.]

Dearest G.

Luckily I walked down to the p. o. and got your letter to night. I did not come on Thursday as I intended because I positively could not get away for domestic reasons. Then on Friday—most unexpectedly—I *had* to go to town, and, being there, I called on Pawling. He told me he had seen you. I asked him whether you had relieved your feelings by cursing me to him. At that he smiled with reserve and naturally I did not insist.

My dearest fellow I entreat you to take my letters literally. I never have any *arrière-pensée* when writing to you—consequently I can not develop any sarcastic tendency. I do not remember exactly now what I have written in my last letter to you, but I know I wrote guided by what I felt then—what I feel now: a very real gratitude for your friendship, for your appreciation, for your criticism; a gratitude for what you are to me—for what you say to me. Do, in the name of all the gods, do give me credit for being able to say damn you—if such was my thought. I, all along, act on the

assumption that *you* would say damn you if such an expression were necessary. That's the true friendship. I wrote that you have the knowledge of artistic effect because I believe you have. You do know. I wish to goodness you didn't. But the more I think of the story[1] the more I feel (I don't see yet) the justice of your pronouncement as to the unreality of the dialogue. Where we differ is there: you say: it is too logical—I say: It is too crude; but I admit that the crudeness (proceeding from want of skill) produces that effect of logic—which is offensive. You see I wanted to give out the gospel of the beastly bourgeois—and wasn't clever enough to do it in a more natural way. Hence the logic which resembles the logic of a melodrama. The childishness of mind coming to the surface. All this I feel. I don't see; because if I did see it I would also see the other way, the mature way—the way of art. I would work from conviction to conviction—through inevitable moments to the final situation. Instead of which I went on creating the moments for the illustration of the idea. Am I right in that view? If so the story is bad art. It is built on the same falsehood as a melodrama.

What delighted me was the remark in your 2nd letter that the phrasing was good. I did try to phrase well and it was not easy, writing as I did with a constant, haunting fear of being lost in the midst of thickening untruth. I felt all the time there was *something* wrong with that story. I feel it now more than ever. All I've written above is only an honest attempt

[1] *The Return.*

to understand the failure. It is very important that I should. Am I anywhere near it yet?

I sent the story to Chap. & Hall with a letter, subtle but full of assurance. I had an answer by *return of post* from Oswald Crawford. He said the story is too long for any single number of the Magazine. But he would like to have my work which he knows and admires. He will read and decide within a fortnight. He thinks it may be used in the Xmas Number, (Here I nearly fell off my chair in a fit of laughter. Can't you imagine the story read by the domestic hearthstone in the season of festivity?) tho' it is somewhat too long even for that. He wants to know my price for serial rights Brit. and Am.

I replied: Delighted he likes my work, follows a small lecture on art to prove that the story can *not* be divided. (If so the *MORAL* effect lost.) A hint that the moral effect is nothing less than beautiful. A sentimental phrase about the moral endeavour giving courage to the worker. A declaration that I attach a great importance to the story. Then: my price for serial rights *Brit.* & *Am.* is £50 and I point out that this is at a rate *less* than what Messrs Blackwood pay me for my story to appear in their Nov^er^ Number. That is perfectly true. £50 works out at about 43/- per thou. while Blackwood pays 45/-

A week has elapsed since and I haven't heard, but the time is not up. I nourish hopes. What do you think?

I haven't heard from Blackwood. When sending

back the proof of *Karain* I asked how was Mr Blackwood and had no answer. I don't think I'll write yet as I have plainly told him to take his time.

I can't get on with the *Rescue*. In all these days I haven't written a line, but there hadn't been a day when I did not wish myself dead. It is too ghastly. I positively don't know what to do. Am I out to the end of my tether? Sometimes I think it must be so.

It did me good to hear that the *Nigger* works miracles. You are a dear fellow to send such news. Pawling after proposing me a paper copy now says he hasn't one. I am horribly disappointed at not being able to carry out my idea of offering it to your Mother.

Heinemann objects to the *bloody's* in the book. That Israelite is afraid of woman. I didn't trust myself to say much in Pawling's room. Moreover Pawling is a good fellow whom I like more every time I see him; and it seemed to me he wanted me to give way. So I struck 3 or 4 *bloody's* out. I am sure there is a couple left yet but, damn it, I am not going to hunt 'em up. I've sent away the last batch of proofs today. Now the *Nigger* is cast adrift from me. The book strikes me as good; but I quite foresee it will have no sale.

What do you think of the *Gadfly*?[1] I wrote what I thought to P, who rejoined gallantly. But it comes to this, if his point of view is accepted, that having suffered is sufficient excuse for the production of rubbish. Well! It may be true too. I may yet make my

[1] *The Gadfly*, by E. Voynitch. Heinemann, 1897.

profit of that argument. However I am not "hollow-eyed" and the author of the *Gadfly* is. Women won't play fair—you know. A hollow-eyed man once tried to impress that truth upon me. I think he was right. But the book is very delightful in a way. Look at the logic. He found his mutton-chop very tough *therefore* he arose and cursed his aunt. And the idea of that battered Gadfly in kid gloves finding his revenge in scolding, is—well—feminine, or I have lived all these bitter years in vain.

It is perfectly delightful. I don't remember ever reading a book I disliked so much.

I see, the *Tormentor*[1] is booming—in the press. Have you found another nugget of virgin gold for the "Patron"? Ah! You do know; you do know. I own that the Standard's review of the *Liza*[2] amazes me. It is no more than justice, but to think the *Standard* could see it. It is the Annus Mirabilis. D'you think I will get my share of loaves and fishes. Eh? Well never mind. The book is written. What worries me now is the unwritten book.

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

Have you enough of *London* to send me. Would you send it? I deserve it for there is hardly a day I do not look into the *Imaged World*—FOR ITSELF not because you've written it.

[1] *The Tormentor*, by Benjamin Swift. Fisher Unwin, 1897.

[2] *Liza of Lambeth*, by Somerset Maugham. Fisher Unwin, 1897.

[*October* 14. 1897]

Dearest G.

It was good to read your letter. I know you've made me and therefore wouldn't be human if you did not take interest in me. But I like to hear you say so—you can't say it too often. It is balm and nectar and sunshine.

I shall be more than delighted to be introduced to your Mother on Friday. You mean on Friday the 22nd—don't you? But I am ready on any day.

I shall go to town tomorrow to meet P. and Crane. I *do* admire him. I shan't have to pretend.

I'm having a tussle with the *Rescue*. I've sent a long epitome to P. The necessity to write it out has brought me to terms with myself. But it's most damnably hard—all the same. I can't, somehow, swing out —so to speak.

Ever yours

Joseph Conrad

Tuesday [*Oct.* 26. 1897.]

My dear Garnett.

I shall be near Queen Anne's statue before St Paul's at 1 o'clock on Thursday. Do come and lunch with me. I have an amusing and instructive tale to tell—a report to make—and certain documents to show.

Chap. and Hall (O. Crawfurd) rejected the *Return* which I fully expected. Only he need not have been

three weeks about it. However I feel cheerful and have at last made a start with the *Rescue*.

JOSEPH CONRAD

Let me know by a word that you've received this.

[*4th November*, 1897]

Dear Garnett.

Meldrum thinks B. means to take R. without reserve. Also thinks that 250 for serial and 50 for book and 15% 20% are terms B. will give. Is going to write informally to find out—like from himself—and let me know early next week.

Thanks for your advice.

Ever yours

CONRAD

5/11/97.

Dearest G.

I had this morning a letter from Pawling so utterly satisfactory to me that there can be no question of even thinking about anyone else as long as he wants me. I am very glad to think that last night the spirit moved me to drop him a postcard where I told him — "I was sorry I worried him about those matters on top of his other worries. That I would write for him rather than for anybody else. That I believed in him implicitly and wished nothing more than to stick to him as long as he would have me." While I wrote the postcard he wrote the letter. And

so the truth came out on both sides. He is a good fellow. I trust he will see I am not a hopelessly bad lot. He promises to give £100 for the next book. To obtain £400 for serial rights. And he writes very nicely. I had rather have his promise than another man's cash down. I shall show—or send you his letter so that you can see how much *you've* done for me.—I have also a paper copy of the *Nigger*. I shall correct it this evening. Do you think it would be breach of etiquette if I send it direct to the Museum. Hadn't I better send it through you? I am immensely relieved. I hope I've done with the *selling* business for life.

Ever yours

Jph. Conrad

The Patron sent bills—agreements etc. etc. I'm done with him.

[*Nov.* 6. 1897]

Dearest G.

I send you P's letter. I replied to it that as long as they stick to me like this I shall stick to them. I trust the selling business is over for life.

I send you a copy of the *N.* for your mother. Present it from me—if you think it isn't too cheeky of me. I've written a few lines there.[1]

[1] This issue of *The Nigger of the Narcissus* is one of seven copies issued by the publisher for the purpose of copyrighting the book, and is catalogued in Wise's *Bibliography* of Joseph Conrad's Works. The faded blue paper wrapper has for sub-title "A Tale of the Forecastle" corrected in Conrad's hand to "A Tale of the Sea." The motto

Now I can shut my door and work.

Thanks are due to you for introducing me to that good fellow P. I hope he will never regret taking me up.

Remember me kindly to your wife.

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

Jess sends her love.

26th Nov. [1897.]

My dear Garnett.

Thanks for letter and books. When I see Crane I shall shake him till he drops the two stories. Cunninghame Graham writes to ask me to dine with him to-night. I shall do so for I am interested in the

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on the title-page is not printed but is inserted in Conrad's hand. The imprint is: London: William Heinemann, 21 Bedford Street, W.C. 1897. (All Rights Reserved.) On the back of the title-page Conrad has written one of his characteristically flattering inscriptions:

> Madam.
>
> Your son & my friend whose sympathy, criticism & counsel have encouraged & guided me ever since I took pen in hand has told me that you like this tale. I wish I could have expressed my sense of your commendation by offering you an unique vellum copy. But since that is impossible—then the other extreme would be better than the middle course. I venture therefore to beg your acceptance of this plain paper copy of the Copyright impression—which, simple as it is, cannot at any rate be obtained for money.
>
> I am, Madam,
>
> Your most obedient humble servant
>
> THE AUTHOR.
>
> *4th Nov.* 1897.

There are a few corrections of misprints, a few erasures of words in Conrad's hand in the 180 pages.

man. . . . The chiel writes to the papers—you know. I am doing nothing and suspect myself of going crazy. Well, we shall see. Humphry James[1] is good. Is he very deep or very simple? And by the bye, R. Bridges is a poet.[2] I'm damned if he ain't! There's more poesy in one page of "Shorter Poems" than in the whole volume of Tennyson. This is my deliberate opinion. And what a descriptive power! The man hath wings—sees from on high. It is the real thing—a direct appeal to mankind, not a certain kind of man. It is natural beauty—not would-be beautiful notions. I love him.

Ever yours
J. C.

5th Dec. 1897.

My dear Garnett.

The *Nigger* came out to date I believe but is not advertised in the *Sat. Review*. As soon as I get my copies I shall forward a specimen to the Cearne.

I had Crane here last Sunday. We talked and smoked half the night. He is strangely hopeless about himself. I like him. The two stories are excellent. Of course *A Man and Some Others* is the best of the two

[1] *Paddy's Woman*, by Humphrey James. Fisher Unwin, 1897. This author, a young Irishman, never received the attention his book of short stories deserved. He told me that to save money he lived in Italy, and taught English, but I lost sight of him.

[2] I had sent Conrad the *Shorter Poems*. It is interesting to record here Conrad's verdict twenty-seven years previous to the presentation to Dr. Bridges of the testimonial from a hundred admirers in October 1924.

but the boat thing[1] interested me more. His eye is very individual and his expression satisfies me artistically. He certainly is *the* impressionist and his temperament is curiously unique. His thought is concise, connected, never very deep—yet often startling. He is *the only* impressionist and *only* an impressionist. Why is he not immensely popular? With his strength, with his rapidity of action, with that amazing faculty of vision—why is he not? He has outline, he has colour, he has movement, with that he ought to go very far. But—will he? I sometimes think he won't. It is not an opinion—it is a feeling. I could not explain why he disappoints me—why my enthusiasm withers as soon as I close the book. While one reads, of course he is not to be questioned. He is the master of his reader to the very last line—then—apparently for no reason at all—he seems to let go his hold. It is as if he had gripped you with greased fingers. His grip is strong but while you feel the pressure on your flesh you slip out from his hand—much to your own surprise. That is my stupid impression and I give it to you in confidence. It just occurs to me that it is perhaps my own self that is slippery. I don't know. *You* would know. No matter.

My soul is like a stone within me. I am going through the awful experience of losing a friend.[2] Hope comes every evening to console me but he has a hopeless task. Death is nothing—and I am used to its

[1] *The Open Boat.*

[2] To whom Conrad had dedicated one of his books.

rapacity. But when life robs one of a man to whom one has pinned one's faith for twenty years the wrong seems too monstrous to be lived down. Yet it must. And I don't know why, how, wherefore. Besides there are circumstances which make the event a manifold torment. Some day I will tell you the tale. I can't write it now. But there is a psychological point in it. However this also does not matter.

The *Nigger* is ended and the *N.R.* stops. I suppose you've heard already. Henley printed the preface at the end as an Author's note. It does not shine very much, but I am glad to see it in type. This is all the news. No criticisms appeared as yet. I am trying to write the *Rescue* and all my ambition is to make it good enough for a magazine—readable in a word. I doubt whether I can. I struggle without pleasure like a man certain of defeat.

Drop me a line.

Ever yours

Jph. Conrad

Tuesday [*Dec.* 7. 1897]

Dearest Garnett,

Thanks. It is admirable—admirable. I am not speaking of Turgeniev. But surely to render thus the very spirit of an incomparable artist one must have more than a spark of the sacred fire. The reader does not *see* the language—the story is alive—as living as when it came from the master's hand. This is a great achievement. I have been reading with in-

expressible delight—not the delight of novelty for I knew and remembered the stories[1] before—but with the delight of revelling in that pellucid flaming atmosphere of Turgeniev's life which the translator has preserved unstained, unchilled, with the clearness and heat of original inspiration. To me there is something touching like a great act of self-sacrifice and devotion in this perfect fidelity to a departed breath. The capacity to be so true to what is best is a great—an incomparable gift. Thanks many times for the book. I see you put the date 3rd of Dec.[2] Did you know that on that day I went over the rise of forty to travel downwards—and a little more lonely than before. Tell your wife I am deeply grateful to her for the happy moments with the book—yesterday. I am trying to write—what folly!

Ever yours

Joseph Conrad

Friday. 17*th Dec.* 97.

My dear Garnett,

I am awfully sorry. I sat at Lyons' upstairs and near the stairs till 4.20 and then had to go, as I could not lose the train and had to buy first something for my wife. Thanks for all you say. Next time

[1] *The Torrents of Spring and Other Stories*, by Ivan Turgenev. Translated by Constance Garnett. Heinemann, 1897.

[2] The inscription in the presentation copy: "J C. from E G. Dec. 3. 1897. I see the Nigger is out at last. I drink its luck though its life is assured for ever. Do you know Maria Nickolaevna sent herewith?"

we meet we shall have a talk—a real talk. Your friendship is so much part of my life that I refer all my thoughts to you—and to think of you consoles me. I trust we will meet soon. Meantime when I have about twenty pages written, I shall send them to you in MS., for my type operator is as you know off duty. Would you undertake to have them typed for me? What worries me is that Pawling does not advertise me much. I daresay he knows what to do. The *Star* has given me an enthused little notice[1] with special heading. I am glad because I want Pawling to keep cheerful about me. Why the devil does he not send me my free copies? I am ashamed to ask any more. The copy for the Cearne shall be for your wife. You, having the whole, cannot want a part and economy is a great word.

Ever yours

Jph. C.

23 *Dec.* 97. *Stanford-le-hope.*

My dear Garnett.

Your letter did my eyes good. I wait anxiously for the Morris book. I've an idea of him. He was an artist and a man of art. The gibes about Wardour Street I've seen and they seemed to me contemptible.

I post tomorrow a copy of the *N.* to your wife. You have the whole edition so can't want a copy. My best wishes to you all—no more sincere today than on other days of the year but this is supposed to be the

[1] Of *The Nigger of the Narcissus.*

proper time for expressing durable sentiments in words which, pronounced, vanish and leave no trace—except in a heart here and there—yours, for instance.[1]

[1] My wife expressed her appreciation of the *Nigger* in the following letter:

The Cearne
Dec. 30. 1897.

Dear Mr. Conrad,

I have been reading the *Nigger*, parts of which I saw as it appeared in the "New Review". Two things have struck me particularly in it,—its extraordinary reality and the great beauty of your style. A letter of yours which Edward shewed me lately has been the warmest and most appreciative praise I have received for my Turgenev and frankly I feel that praise from you who have such mastery of language is worth the praise of forty English reviewers. For I feel, as I have always told Edward, that your brain does not think English thoughts,—as Turgenev's own,—it is more delicate, more subtle, richer and more varied than ours. Your use of adjectives—so chosen, fastidious, often ironical—reminds me again and again of Turgenev's manner. It is really you that ought to have had the task of translating him.

I feel so grateful for the insight you have given me into the sailors. It is such as they are the everlasting fascinating masculine enigma for us women. The artist is more than half feminine, and him we can make shift by glimpses to understand, at least as well as any way he is understood by his common fellow men.

On board the "Narcissus" I have a delightful feeling, not unmixed with awe, of being in a new world, where I certainly have no business, and where I am picking up hints and glimpses at every step. Though your realism rather scares me at times! Your storm! It left me chilled and shivering, full of admiration for the wonderful masculine animal that faces such and comes through it, but a little whipped and crushed before his overwhelming, obvious superiority.

It gives me the greatest pleasure that you should have dedicated your book to Edward, and I am sure that in sympathy you are never divided.

Please give my love to your wife and my warmest best wishes for her health and strength. I wish you both much happiness and all good luck in the New Year.

Yours very truly,
Constance Garnett.

I had a most enthused letter from Quiller Couch. He says the book[2] "*must*" be a success. Is writing about it in the *Pall Mall Maga*: in February. He says "truthful and heroic"—that's what he says. He has tested it on an old salt and they both conclude that "this *is* a book." I am pleased with that appreciation. The *Daily Chronicle* gives special article with a leaded heading—but you must have seen it as that is your household idol—isn't it? I am writing the *R*! I am writing! I am harassed with anxieties but the thing comes out! Nothing decisive has happened yet.

Ever yours

JPH. CONRAD

[2] *The Nigger of the Narcissus.*

7th Jan 98

My dear Garnett,

I've been putting off writing so as to send you the MS.[1] at the same time. But I meant to have a little more still, for you to see, so that you may judge of the way I take hold of the actual story.

I had a most kind appreciative and good letter from your wife—and more shame to me not to have acknowledged it. Present my excuses. I was delighted. I've pasted it in my copy of the *N.* the most prided words of praise and specially interesting as disclosing the woman's point of view to look at such a rough performance.

The P. writes he can't anyhow place the *Return* and I give it up. What upset me is that he means to fire off the book *at once*! At the same time Pawling writes me he is going to start the *Nigger* upon the booksellers—He is going to "bang it" he says. If the books clash it will be fatal to both of them.

I wrote a temperate letter to the P. telling him that I sold him the book for spring publication—end March at earliest—and that it was so agreed plainly in our conversation. That I object to publication at once—thinking it bad for the *stories*—from a business point of view. He must let the Reviewers have their say about one thing before throwing at them another. Firm

[1] *The Rescue.*

and polite. Reminded him of our talk. Said I hold him to it. But really I am helpless. . . .

I think I am going to have the 2nd part of the *Rescue* written by first week in Febry. Meantime things are pretty serious with me. Casting about for ways to obtain bread and *peace* the following commercial transaction suggested itself to me. . . . [Conrad details some particulars here omitted.]

As you have done so much for me—in fact everything—with Pawling I submit this plan to you and should you dislike it I shall forbear mentioning it to our friend. I don't want to do anything that would look as if I were trying to get *at* Pawling. To my mind it appears a simple commercial transaction in which risk and profit are on one side and a great convenience on the other. And I think that the risk is so small that to propose the affair is not quite like begging on my part. What do you think ? Would you add to the many acts of brotherly regard and give your thought to this—and then tell me frankly what you think. That I must borrow money somewhere is very evident; and no man can so well understand the only security I offer than Pawling. I don't think he would be *annoyed* by such a proposal. Do you? After all I've given him in Nov^er^ a very fair chance to choke me off, which he would *not* take. He believes in me? Or is it only the stress of competition?

At any rate I do not wish to say anything till nearly ½ the book is written. (2 parts complete) He writes to me in a most friendly manner and seems pleased

with the reviews. He says that he is going to work the *N.* off on the booksellers after the 15th inst when they have finished stock-taking. I have confidence in him but don't expect much. Still perhaps the *Nigger* may exist for a few years and so not be a bad spec for him. . .

. . . I had 23 reviews. One indifferent (The Standard) and *one bad* (*the Academy*) Two or three of a hesitating kind in prov. papers. The rest unexpectedly appreciative. Did I tell you I had a warm letter from Quiller Couch? He is going to say something about the book in Pall Mall Magazine for Febry.—I'll be sending you the *R.* next week. A damned pot boiler. But I am quite interested myself tho' I write without pleasure.

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

Jessie sends her love and thanks to your wife. She wants to know whether Bunny remembers her. We are standing by here.

Monday 6. 1. 98

Dearest G.

Your letter is most helpful. I shall write to C— Graham to night. I am in *intimate* correspondence with him. He writes to me every week once or even twice. He is struck. Pawling is (lately) also in correspondence with him. What about I don't know but P. did mention this to me incidentally in his last letter.

I can speak plainly to C. G. about the *Sat. R.* idea.[1] I don't know whether he is on very good terms with F. H.[2] tho'. Fact to note: *all* the fiction (it may be called) the *S. R.* publishes is furnished by C. G. alone.

I don't see why P. should fail to fix serial of *Rescue* since Blackwood was positively ready to accept it. The only question is *time*. The *Rescue* would have perhaps to wait a year or so for a place. Scribners would have made offer if they had not been full for '98 & '99. And even then if the book had been *finished* they would have made an offer. So their letter to P. (I've seen it) says. Still this may be a too sanguine view. I send you by this post my copy of *N.* with *notices*.

Thanks millions of times. You are a whole mountain of bricks—to think and scheme for me so. I'm indeed blessed in *this* friendship.

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

Look in the *N.* copy *back* and front. The Lond. Dailies are all in front. Are these good *selling* notices? I don't think so.

After I hear from C. G. I may try Q. but this I am more reluctant to do. Do write what you think of N. and Why. I study it and there seems now like a flavour of failure about it.

[1] My idea was that Conrad might place short stories with *The Saturday Review*, and that the latter might serialise longer fiction.

[2] Frank Harris.

15*th*-1. 98

My dear Garnett,

Infant of male persuasion[1] arrived today and made a great row. Everything is going on well here.

I had a warm letter from Graham. He offers to write Harris—thinks the idea splendid—and so on. I have in him a friend at court indeed. I replied telling him to go ahead.

Chesson wrote me a splendid letter about the *Nigger*. It quite cheered me. I haven't written anything of the story since I saw you, but I think of it every day.

Crane wrote me, also, a penitent letter for not replying to mine at Xmas. He says he finds it easier to write *about* me than to me. Says he has written about me, but *where* he says not.

Graham said incidentally he would have liked to review the *Nigger*. I told him he may be in time yet.

Upon the whole the Harris business might come off if Graham's letter reached him when he is in good temper. I shall let you know without delay how it turns out.

My kindest regards to your wife.

Ever yours

Joseph Conrad

Sinjohn[2] writes me that the *N.* is in great request at his club—Junior Carlton. Great guns! I wish they would buy it.

[1] Borys. [2] John Galsworthy.

Monday evening [*January* 24. 1898.]

Dear Garnett,

I have your letter and the proofs.[1] You are the best of fellows to go through all that disgusting kind of toil for me. And my ingratitude is so complete, is so black that I can by no means be ashamed of it. This morning for half an hour or perhaps a little less I disliked you with the utmost cordiality and sat brooding about some way to do you a serious mischief. But now—at 5 pm—I feel I could bear the sight of you without showing any unholy emotion.

Yes. Seriously. You are right in everything—even in the suggestion to let the story[2] go as it is. It shall go—and be hanged to it. It is bad—and in sober truth I can't bear the sight of it any more. Let it go. No one will notice it particularly, and even if someone arose to solemnly curse it, the story and the curse would be forgotten before the end of the week.

My very sincere thanks to Mrs. Garnett for saying a good word—the only good word—for the woman. Tell her please that as to the story I think it is as false as a sermon by an Archbishop. Exactly. Another man goes out than the man who came in. T'other fellow is dead. You have missed the symbolism of the new gospel (that's what the *Return* is) altogether—and you call yourself a critic! The only weak point in the story is the slamming of the street door at the end. I

This is to you

[1] Of *Tales of Unrest.* [2] *The Return.*

ought to have stopped on the "not even a foot-step on the thick carpet . . . as though no sooner outside he had died and his body had vanished together with his soul" and then in leaded type "He never returned."

That would have made the newspaper boys sit up. They would have wanted to know where he went to, how he got downstairs; they would have made guesses at it—they would have called it realism, naturalism, or new humour. I've missed fame by a hair's breadth. And then we could have hired some chinaman of letters to explain that the whole story is transcendental symbolico-positivist with traces of illuminism. I've missed my best chance. Enough fooling. It strikes me I am "taking up your valuable time"

Ever yours

J Conrad

Jess sends her love to Mrs Garnett and desires me to state that the baby is a very fine baby. I disclaim all responsibility for that statement. *Do* you really think the volume[1] *will do*?

Wednesday. [*Feb.* 2. 1898.]

Dearest Garnett.

This is a free evening before I go into harness again to pull out of the mire, out of the slough of despond that damned and muddy romance.[2] I am

[1] *Tales of Unrest.* [2] *The Rescuer.*

getting on—and it is very very bad. Bad enough I sometimes think to make my fortune.

The news I want you to know are

1st. The Cranes have invited the lot of us man woman and child to stay with them ten days—from 19th February—and I've accepted for I feel that if there is no break I will go crazy or go out altogether.

2nd. Harris keeps quiet like a man in hiding. Graham blasphemes and curses.

3rd. I've gone and done it. I write for the press!!!!!! I've sent to the *Outlook* an unconceivably silly thing about A. Daudet.[1] "Words! words! words!" Apparently that's what they want. They asked for more. Today I've sent another silly thing about Kipling. It took me one and a half days to write 1500 words. I can do this kind of thing quicker than the muddy romance. Damn! I've lost the last shred of belief in myself. I simply *dare not* send you the MS. But ultimately I shall. It is unredeemed trash. Are you near enough to Crane to be invaded? My wife shall want to show the blessed baby to your wife. I hate babies. Will you manage to see me while I am there? Do you object to read 100 pages of my handwriting? It feels like a lot of wheels in my head.

I am sending you here a bit of the *Sat. Rev.* Symons criticising trans: of Annunzio mentions Kipling and myself as you can see.

Frankly—is the remark true?

That the Voynich book[2] sells does not surprise me.

[1] It was published in the *Outlook*, April 9th, 1898.

[2] *The Gadfly*, by E. Voynich.

Some people will take it as an attack on the Popish religion. La bêtise humaine est capable de tout.

It is bad with me when the thought does not unfold itself easily when talking to a friend. I feel I am boring you with this letter—and yet don't wish to stop. I can't say half the things I want to say.

I want to hear you speak—I do. I want to come in contact with your thought.

I am again thinking of attacking Pawling. Something must be done and that soon. With a book half written I can talk better to the man. He is a good fellow. I should not like him to curse the day he set eyes on me. If he feels so sure of *Scribners* why not accept my proposal on a business basis: Acquire from me my serial rights. The risk will be great enough to prove his goodwill and friendship anyhow. As to asking him to, plainly speaking, pension me I don't think I can. Moreover do you think he would care to keep a private author on the staff? I won't do anything without giving you information in time for a last word of advice. For after all you are the serpent and I am a bedraggled silly dove.

Jess sends her love—she intends to write tomorrow to your wife. Everybody here is in rude health at which I am sorry because of the enormous appetites which is so expensive—and the stores running low at that.

Ever yours

Jph. Conrad

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Jess sends her love—she intends to write tomorrow to your wife. Everybody here is in rude health at which I am sorry because of the enormous appetites which is so expensive—and the stores running low at that.

Ever yours

Jph. Conrad

Thursday [*February* 10. 1898.]

Dearest G.

Just a word to thank you for your invitation. We shall certainly call on you but as to inflicting the baby and all for more than a day—well it would be taking a mean advantage of your hospitality.

—I saw Pawling the other day. He is very nice. Thinks prospect of Scribners distinctly good. What he wants me to do is to get ready as much of the story as I can and send it off to Am. by the mail of the 25th inst. so as to reach N.Y. while Heinemann is still there. (He left yesterday). I shall therefore write all I can up to the last moment—and Pawling says he shall get the *typing* done in one day. Must write another chapter and correct shorten and arrange part 1st. Then about 45,000 words shall go to the Yanks—and we shall see.

Jess sends her thanks and love. She is very keen on that visit. You may live yet to regret bitterly your indiscretion in suggesting its possibility.

In haste.

Ever yours

Joseph Conrad

Sunday evening. [*March* 14. 1898.]

Dearest G.

Thanks ever so much for your letter, and more still for your promise to come on Friday next. Do come early. Could you get here for lunch. There is a train from Fenchurch Street at 11.35 a.m.

You have already cheered me up. I did miss you dreadfully. I had really a hard time of it and not a soul to turn to.

Jess sends her kind regards and is anxious for you to see the baby. The poor girl is a perfect slave to it—but thinks she likes it.

Of course we can put you up—and you shall sleep as long as you like or the baby likes.

Could you find out any facts about the sales of the *Tales*.[1] Unwin wrote me the book went off well!!? What could have been his object?

Ever yours

CONRAD

My friendly regards to Mrs. Garnett. Jess sends her love to her and to Bunny. Remember me to that promising youth!

Monday. [*March* 21. 1898.]

My dear Garnett

Well. It isn't so bad as I expected if in every two pages only one and a half are too bad for anything.

To tell you the truth I hate the thing[2] with such great hatred that I don't want to look at it again. I have read your remarks. Gospel truth—except where you try to cheer me on. I shall certainly go on—that is if I can. The best about the work is that it is *sold.*

[1] *Tales of Unrest.*

[2] *The Rescue.*

They've got to take it. But the thought that such rubbish is produced at the cost of positive agony fills me with despair. I have not an atom of courage left.

It was awful good of you to read and annotate. I don't know how to thank you. I shall try to do something before it appears as a book. Now I haven't the strength nor the pluck.

My kindest regards to Mrs. Garnett. Love to Bunny. Is his cold better? I *haven't* been well.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

My wife sends her love to you all.

29th March. [1898.]

My dear Garnett.

I am ashamed of myself. I ought to have written to you before, but the fact is I have not written anything at all. When I received your letter together with part II.[d] of *R.* I was in bed—this beastly nervous trouble. Since then I've been better but have been unable to write. I sit down religiously every morning, I sit down for eight hours every day—and the sitting down is all. In the course of that working day of 8 hours I write 3 sentences which I erase before leaving the table in despair. There's not a single word to send you. Not one! And time passes—and McClure waits —not to speak of Eternity for which I don't care a damn. Of McClure however I am afraid.

I ask myself sometimes whether I am bewitched,

whether I am the victim of an evil eye? But there is no "jettatura" in England—is there? I assure you—speaking soberly and on my word of honour—that sometimes it takes all my resolution and power of self control to refrain from butting my head against the wall. I want to howl and foam at the mouth but I daren't do it for fear of waking that baby and alarming my wife. It's no joking matter. After such crises of despair I doze for hours still half conscious that there is that story I am unable to write. Then I wake up, try again—and at last go to bed completely done-up. So the days pass and nothing is done. At night I sleep. In the morning I get up with the horror of that powerlessness I must face through a day of vain efforts.

In these circumstances you imagine I feel not much inclination to write letters. As a matter of fact I had a great difficulty in writing the most commonplace note. I seem to have lost all *sense* of style and yet I am haunted, mercilessly haunted by the *necessity* of style. And that story I can't write weaves itself into all I see, into all I speak, into all I think, into the lines of every book I try to read. I haven't read for days. You know how bad it is when one *feels* one's liver, or lungs. Well I feel my brain. I am distinctly conscious of the contents of my head. My story is there in a fluid—in an evading shape. I can't get hold of it. It is all there—to bursting, yet I can't get hold of it no more than you can grasp a handful of water.

There! I've told you all and feel better. While I write this I am amazed to see that I can write. It

looks as though the spell were broken but I hasten, I hasten lest it should in five minutes or in half an hour be laid again.

I tried to correct Part II. according to your remarks. I did what I could—that is I knocked out a good many paragraphs. It's so much gained. As to alteration, rewriting and so on I haven't attempted it—except here and there a trifle—for the reason I could not think out anything different to what is written. Perhaps when I come to my senses I shall be able to do something before the *book* comes out. As to the serial it must go anyhow. I would be thankful to be able to write anything, anything, any trash, any rotten thing —something to earn dishonestly and by false pretences the payment promised by a fool.

That's how things stand to-day; and to-morrow would be more mysterious if it were not so black! I write you a nice cheery letter for a good-bye:[1] don't I, dear old fellow. That's how we use our friends. If I hadn't written I would have burst.

Good luck to you and buon' viaggio signore. Think of me sometimes. Are you going to Milan? It's 24 years since I saw the Cathedral in moonlight. Tempi passati—I had young eyes then. Don't give all your time to the worship of Botticelli. Somebody should explode that superstition. But there, *you* know better. It is good of you to think of the boy. He is bigger every day. I would like to make a bargeman of him: strong, knowing his business and thinking of nothing. That is

[1] E. G. was about to take a holiday in Italy.

the life my dear fellow. Thinking of nothing! O! bliss. I had a lunch with Blackwood good old smoothbore. Also Cunning: Graham came down to see me the day before dining with your father. Has been in bed since but writes every second day. Recommend my short stories to your friend. Have you seen the *Nigger* notice in *Literature* of last week—Amazing. Jess sends her best love.

Vale frater

Yours ever

J. C.

18*th May* 98

My dear Garnett.

I've sent off your letter to Cunningham Graham. I've looked into it. What you say is just. Your idea of the "colonial" series[1] is excellent.

What shall I say? Things aren't well with me dear friend. I grow a little hopeless now. Writing is as difficult as ever.

Forgive me if I do not come to see you in town. And yet I want to see you very much. When you are again abreast of your work and can find time run down to see me here. A word the day before will do. I am not likely to move from here.

My wife sends her kindest regards and hopes we

[1] The *Overseas Library*. Fisher Unwin, 1899. No. 1 of the series was *The Ipané*, by R. B. Cunninghame Graham.

shall see you soon. A ridiculously small quantity of the *Rescue* has been done. I am horribly sick of life.

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

Saturday [*May*. 1898.]

Dearest G.

I've sent you today a copy of the *Children*[1] *etc.*, 3 or 4 of your own books and that amazing masterpiece *Bel-Ami*. The technique of that work gives to one acute pleasure. It is simply enchanting to see how it's done.

I've sold (I think) the sea things to B. for £35 (13000 words). Meldrum thinks there's no doubt—but still B. must see it himself. McClure has been the pink of perfection "We will be glad to get as much as we can for you in America"—and so on. He is anxious to have a book of short tales. I think *Jim* (20,000) *Youth* (13,000) *A Seaman* (5,000) *Dynamite* (5000) and another story of say 15,000 would make a volume for B. here and for McC. there. That is after serial publication. I broached the subject and they seem eager. Have made no conditions but said I would like to know what B. would offer. As to McC. I leave it vague for the present.

The *Rescue* shall not begin till *October* next. That means book form for winter season of 1899. A long

[1] *The Children of the Sea.* The American edition of *The Nigger of the Narcissus.*

time to wait—and to find it after all a dead frost—perhaps.

I don't feel a bit more hopeful about the writing of *Rescue* than before. It's like a curse. I can't *imagine* anything.

How do you like C. Graham?

Jess sends her love to you all

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

I told C. Graham to get Mrs Garnett's translation of Turgeniev. He admires T. but only read the French rendering. My most friendly regards to your wife.

Tuesday [*May*. 1898.]

Dearest G.

Thanks for your letter. I am glad you like C-Graham who certainly is unique

As to *Rescue* you are under a 'misapyrehension' as Shaw would have said. I intend to write nothing else. I am not even going to finish *Jim* now. Not before Sept*er*. The talk about short stories has been commenced by those men B. and Mcl. and seeing them willing to discuss the future I gave them an idea of what I would do. The fact however remains that this *Rescue* makes me miserable—frightens me—and I shall not abandon it—even temporarily—I must get on with it, and it will destroy my reputation. Sure!

B. has returned yesterday and Meldrum wrote me saying I shall hear from him very soon.

Thanks for your care, for your thought. Alas no one can help me. In the matter of R. I have lost all sense of form and I can't see *images*. But what to write I *know*. I have the action only the hand is paralysed when it comes to giving expression to that action. If I am too miserable I shall groan to you O! best of men.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

[*June* 1898].

Dearest Garnett,

Thanks. Do come when you can.

I send you a few pages of P. III. The rest is not typed yet.

I am awfully behind and though I can work my regular I cannot make up for the lost three months. I am full of anxiety. Here, I have already had a 100 pounds on acct.! And the end is not in sight. Horrid mess I am in.

I'll tell you everything when you do come. I am living in a hell of my own.

Thanks for the books

Ever yours

Conrad

Jess sends her love to you all. The boy is teething and is in a devil of a temper night and day.

Tuesday July 7. 1898.

My dear Garnett,

This day with you has done me good. I feel much calmer and more hopeful about my work. I still think it very bad and do not feel that eagerness to show it to you which in the past impelled me to forward successive chapters—hot from the oven—for your inspection. However I send two parts[1] by this morning's post. You shall read and see; I am afraid that even as an infamous pot-boiler this book is too unskilfully made. I think I went wrong from the beginning but now I am waist deep and there is no going back.

My kindest regards to Mrs Garnett. My wife sends her love. We are well here.

Ever yours

Joseph Conrad

3d *Aug.* '98.

My dear Garnett.

I am not dead tho' only half alive. Very soon I shall send you some MS. I am writing hopelessly—but still I am writing. How I feel I cannot express. Pages accumulate and the story stands still.

I feel suicidal.

Drop me a line and tell me where and how you are.

[1] *The Rescue.*

McIntyre is a scientific swell who talks art, knows artists of all kinds—looks after their throats, you know. He has given himself a lot of trouble in my interest and means to hammer away at it till I do get something.

All day with the ship-owners and in the evening dinner, phonograph, X rays, talk about *the* secret of the Universe, and the nonexistence of, so called, matter. The secret of the universe is in the existence of horizontal waves whose varied vibrations are at the bottom of all states of consciousness. If the waves were vertical the universe would be different. This is a truism. But, don't you see, there is nothing in the world to prevent the simultaneous existence of vertical waves, or waves at any angles; in fact there are mathematical reasons for believing that such waves do exist. Therefore it follows that two universes may exist in the same place and in the same time—and not only two universes but an infinity of different universes—if by universe we mean a set of states of consciousness. And, note, *all* (the universes) composed of the same matter, matter, *all matter* being only that thing of inconceivable tenuity through which the various vibrations of waves (electricity, heat, sound, light, etc.) are propagated, thus giving birth to our sensations—then emotions—then thought. Is that so?

These things I said to the Dr. while Neil Munro stood in front of a Röntgen machine and on the screen behind we contemplated his backbone and his ribs. The rest of that promising youth was too diaphanous to be visible. It was so—said the Doctor—and there

is no space, time, matter, mind as vulgarly understood, there is only the eternal something that waves and an eternal force that causes the waves—it's not much—and by the virtue of these two eternities exists that Corot and that Whistler in the diningroom upstairs (we were in a kind of cellar) and Munro's here writings and your Nigger and Graham's politics and Paderewski's playing (in the phonograph) and what more do you want?

What we wanted (apparently) was more whisky. We got it. Mrs McIntyre went to bed. At one o'clock Munro and I went out into the street. We talked. I had read up the Lost Pibroch which I do think wonderful in a way. We foregathered very much indeed and I believe Munro didn't get home till five in the morning. He turned up next day and burned incense before me, and saw me into the train after a dinner at the Art Club (not to speak of the whisky).

This is the true and faithful report of our gestes in Glesga. I returned to the bosom of my family at 1 pm. today and wrote to Hueffer at once to clinch the matter (there's no matter) of Pent Farm (which is only a vain and delusive appearance). I hope I may get it. If I don't I shall vanish into space (there's no space) and the vibrations that make up me, shall go to the making of some other fool.

I feel less hopeless about things and particularly about the damned thing called *the Rescue*. Tomorrow I write but this evening I feel nervy. When I feel sure of Pent Farm I shall be comparatively happy.

If we get fixed there you must come and stay with us a good long time when your wife is in France. This is what I am looking forward to now. Look ever forward, ever forward. What a sell! For me to look forward is folly—but then it's good. Don't you throw cold water on my vision. There's no reason why you should. We shall work. By heavens and earth we shall work!

We three send our love to you three.

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

Sunday [*Oct.* 9. 1898]

My dear Edward,

I am very anxious to see the horrors of the *Academy*. You are a dear old generaliser. I fancy you've generalized me into a region of such glory that no mortal henceforth will succeed in finding me in my work. However this letter is not written for the purpose of abusing you but strange as it may seem—on business which may concern you.

I went on Friday to Pent Farm. On my way I called on Robert McClure whom I had not seen since the letter and telegram I showed you—as you may remember. He insisted upon feeding me and, while we chewed, the conversation which turned upon famous criminals of history by some strange association of ideas reached your name. Robert must have heard of you from Pawling?—or rather *about* you—and wanted

to know more. Then by gradations too subtle to record he came out plainly with his desire to make your acquaintance. He means something. I am pretty sure he has some definite idea in his mind. What it is I don't know—but I encouraged it all I could for this reason that anything I may have said not engaging you by any possibility yet gave him the notion that you were open at any rate to listen to any proposal he might make. I wish I may be shot if I don't think he wants to carry you off from Unwin. However that may be he asked me whether I could bring you two together—dinner or something. I told him it could be done almost any Thursday or Friday in the week. I don't suppose you can have any objection to meeting McClure—a very decent little chap. You know how well he behaves to me. He is quite in earnest. At parting he told me "I have a matter of business to bring before him" or words to that effect, the word *business* being pronounced. Upon that I said I would arrange the thing. As my train went off he shouted "don't forget" about Garnett?—Now when, how, do you wish it to come off? If you do wish? I think there's no possible harm. Could we manage a lunch on next Friday or Friday after next. I want to officiate and it would be more convenient for me to make it a lunch instead of a dinner because of the wretched trains. Drop me a line and then I shall know what to say to McClure.

——I like Pent. It will do. We're going there for the 26th.—Ford tells me you don't like the place. I

hope tho' you like me well enough to come and stay. I fancy I'll get on there all right. I always hope. Oh well.

Ever yours

CONRAD

Wednesday [*Oct.* 12. 1898.]

Dearest Edward,

It[1] is magnificent. I can't conceive how you could find in me the source of such vibrating, tender and illuminating utterance. I can't conceive but I can accept. It is absorbingly interesting to me not as an appreciation of myself but as disclosure of you. And I appear to myself wrapped in the glamour of your intuition—not of what has been done, but of what should be done, what should be tried for, what should be desired—what cannot be attained.

I send back the proof without more words because I feel I can't arrange them into an artistic expression of gratitude—not for what you say but for what you feel. But I am very proud of what you feel and also a little humiliated. There is likewise a grim delight in the thought that now you have spoken you can't take it back—never—never.

Ever yours

CONRAD

I wire to McClure and shall write you tonight where and when we meet.

[1] Article in *The Academy*, 15th Oct. 1898, by E. G. entitled "Mr. Joseph Conrad."

Stanford-le-hope. Wednesday. [*Oct.* 12 1898.]

Dearest G.

I propose that little (Hotel d'Italie?) shop at the back of Palace Music Hall where they have tolerable Asti. The time to be 1.15 p.m. Say first floor—or still better private room. I know they've got one. You shall be there first no doubt and if so pray use your judgment. If the public room on 1st floor is crowded retain the *cabinet*—if not, retain a table good for three. Or if you think privacy desirable you had better retain the *cabinet* in any case. I shall bring Mac along which probably may detain me a little. If place does not commend itself to you write at once proposing something more suitable. There is however no need to be ceremonious with Mac and the food if I remember rightly is tolerable in that gargotte. We mustn't pamper editors (this is a joke). I've destroyed all I did write last month but my brain feels alive and my heart is not afraid now. Permanent state?—who knows. Always hope.

Write p.c. to say you got this all right.

Ever yours

Jph. Conrad

Monday. [*Nov.* 7. 1898.]

Dearest Edward,

Did you think I had died? We are here —over a week now and the place is a success. I reckon

Ford told you. I reckon you disapprove. "I rebel! I said I would rebel." (d'you know the quotation).[1]

I send you here Henley's letter on the matter. I feel hopeful about my own work. Completely changed. When do you come here. When? Both of you with Bunny. Or you alone to begin with. I feel orphaned. Are you in Constple?[2]

Ever yours

CONRAD

Love from us all.

Pent Farm Stanford, Near Hythe [*Dec.* 18. 1898.]

My dearest Garnett,

I was glad to see thy fist. The Crane thing[3] is just—precisely just a ray flashed in and showing all there is.

Jess' and my love to you, and best wishes—and through to all yours please when you write.

Before Mrs Garnett comes back you must come and see me—us.

I've been writing not so badly.

Now I am at a short story[4] for B'wood which I must get out for the sake of the shekels.

Then again at the *R.*

[1] From Turgenev's *Fathers and Children.*

[2] A Constantinople project which came to nothing.

[3] Article by Edward Garnett in *The Academy*, Dec. 17, 1898. "Mr. Stephen Crane. An Appreciation."

[4] *Heart of Darkness.*

Come soon. I've read the play.[1] There's something to say about it but viva voce when we meet.

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

I don't send you type of *R.* because *McC.* is always anxious to get it back at once. And there's nothing to boast of.

Galsworthy is awfully anxious to make your acquaintance.

[1] *A Christmas Play for Children*, by E. G.

1899

Pent Farm Stanford, Near Hythe Kent 13 *Jan* 99.

My dear Garnett

Have you seen *it*! *It*! *The Academy*.[1] When I opened the letter I thought it was a mistake. But it was too true, alas. I've lost the last ounce of respect for my art. I am lost—gone—done for—for the consideration of 50 gs.

I suppose Lucas worked like a horse to get this awful, awful job through. I suppose you worked too—or no—I won't suppose. Where do you chaps expect to go to when you die?

Ah if I could only write! If I could write, write, write! But I cannot. No 50 gs. will help me to that, However I am turning over some rotten stuff[2] for B'wood's 1000th Nr. Been Asked to!

Honours will never cease. 'House' wrote autograph! Ah will you—says I. Thereupon I cram them with rubbish. As soon as I turn out the last line I shall come to town for a couple of days. Must see you. Also others. Let me know where you perch. Where you hop too.

Ever yours

Joseph C

What news of your wife and boy?

[1] Conrad had been "crowned" by *The Academy* and awarded a Prize of 50 guineas.

[2] *Heart of Darkness*.

Tuesday [*February* 1899.]

My dear good Garnett.

I saw Shorter who didn't eat me. I can't appear in the *Illd. Lond. News* not so much because I am not ready but because McClure told Shorter that the story shall be 60-65,000 words long only and Shorter had calculated upon that for the *News.* (14 weeks instalments).

How McClure made that mistake I can't imagine, as the synopsis stated distinctly minimum of 90,000 words; probably 110,000.

I set Shorter right on that point. He didn't seem sorry to get a lot of copy for his money but said I must go into the *Eng. Ill. Magazine.* Hopes the *News* will get some other work of mine by and by. Ran out after me to ask whether I had a short story by me to appear in *News* at once. Told him hadn't. Salaams. Then ran out again to ask whether I had a friend who would write something about me in the *Eng. Ill. Mag.* I said I hadn't a friend but had a good enemy Edward Garnett who perhaps could be induced to commit such an atrocity. He hastened to inform me he knew your Father. I had the baseness to give him your address and escaped without a particle of self respect from that horrid den. So you know what to expect.

Are you angry with me? When I know how you feel about this my mind shall be at ease. It's a pity, in a sense, I missed the *News.* On the other hand it's for-

tunate the thing is arranged. I shall drive ahead all the same, and probably invade you—if you still will have me after what I've done, I fancy Shorter wants to see whether my story can't give a fillip to the circulation of the wretched Magazine. If so he prepares a bitter disappointment for himself.

Thanks for your visit my dear dear fellow. Water in the desert could not have been more welcome.

Heaps of blessings on your head.

Ever yours

CONRAD

Since I wrote this I got this letter from Shorter. What a damned barnacle!

Good Friday

in sorrow and tribulation

Dearest Garnett.

What do you think of me? Think I love you though I am a dumb dog or no better than a whining dog. There's not a spark left in me. I am overwhelmed and utterly flattened. Hueffers are gone —yesterday. So is McClure who came for the night. A decent little chap I say if I got to die for it!

Is trying to ram the *Rescue* into the Atlantic Monthly but the *R.* is *not* finished yet—not yet—not yet.

"I'll be your banner" says little McClure—this is better than a kick on the shin bone I guess; but the spirit suffers.

Give our love to your restored household. Restored to you—I mean. H. said you reproached him for his fleeting sojourn here. It is not conclusive evidence but if so learn that our friends cannot save us from the effects of our own folly.

Are you angry with me?

If so learn that I am so hardened by adversity that your anger glides off me as a dart glances off a turtle's back, and I still continue to radiate affection on you—my affection which is not so offensive as Wells' Martian's Heat-ray—but nearly as warm.

It won't set the Thames on fire tho'. Nothing of mine will. I think of you with gentle melancholy as of one who has put his money on the wrong horse. I am literally lame. Gout. Brought on by—by—by agitation, exasperation, botheration—you know; those things you laugh at and bite your thumbs at—O! Lord! And I write! I write! I write! Certainly. Write quick. Not quick enough to make up for the frightful leeway. But I write.

And a propos of writing. Have you seen p. III. of *H. of D*?[1] My dear fellow I daren't send you my MS. I feel it would worry you. I feel my existence alone worries you enough. This is not conceit; quite the contrary.

But drop me word of p. III.

Fact is I am not worthy to take up your thought. The more I write the less substance do I see in my work.

[1] *Heart of Darkness.* Published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, Feb., March and April 1899.

The scales are falling off my eyes. It is tolerably awful. And I face it, I face it but the fright is growing on me. My fortitude is shaken by the view of the monster. It does not move; its eyes are baleful; it is as still as death itself—and it will devour me. Its stare has eaten into my soul already deep, deep. I am alone with it in a chasm with perpendicular sides of black basalt. Never were sides so perpendicular and smooth, and high. Above, your anxious head against a bit of sky peers down—in vain—in vain. There's no rope long enough for that rescue.

Why didn't you come? I expected you and fate has sent Hueffer. Let this be written on my tombstone.

Ever yours

CONRAD

[*June.* 1899]

Dearest Edward,

This is the sort of rot I am writing now. Frankly it is not worth troubling about but still I send you this—the first part of a B'wood story in two parts.[1]

Ever yours

CONRAD

Send it back at your leisure. Of course you can see it is not corrected in any way.

[1] *Lord Jim.*

Pent Farm Stanford, Near Hythe Kent 16th Sept. 99.

Dearest Edward,

To drop me a line was a generous action. I had not the courage to write; I feel to you like a son who has gone wrong and what with shame and recklessness remains silent—and yet nourishes the hope of rehabilitation and keeps his eyes fixed steadily on some distant day of pardon and embraces.

It will come, it will come and whether the prodigal comes to you or you come to the prodigal some poor innocent calf is sure to suffer.

I had nothing to write—or else too much—so much that no pieces of paper seemed long enough, no inkwell of adequate depth! And yet when some day we sob together at last over the remains of the obese heifer of forgiveness half a dozen words or a judicious wink of the eye shall make everything clear—every thing clear!

I wouldn't trust C. Graham's literary judgement—I wouldn't—not much. I am writing—it is true—but this is only piling crime upon crime: every line is odious like a bad action. I mean odious to me—because I still have some pretences to the possession of a conscience though my morality is gone to the dogs. I am like a man who has lost his gods. My efforts seem unrelated to anything in heaven and everything under heaven is impalpable to the touch like shapes of mist.

Do you see how easy writing must be under such conditions? Do you see?

Even writing to a friend—to a person one has heard, touched, drank with, quarrelled with—does not give me a sense of reality. All is illusion—the words written, the mind at which they are aimed, the truth they are intended to express, the hands that will hold the paper, the eyes that will glance at the lines. Every image floats vaguely in a sea of doubt—and the doubt itself is lost in an unexplored universe of incertitudes.

I've written. Are you any the wiser? Are you disposed to forgive?

I end here because I must catch the post.

Ever yours

CONRAD

Jessie's love. We are well enough—considering.

Pent Farm Stanford Near Hythe 26th Oct^r 99

Dearest Edward.

Thanks for your letter. If I don't send proofs or type it is because there is, alas, so little to send and what there is, is not worthy. I *feel* it bad; and, unless I am hopelessly morbid, I can not be altogether wrong. So much I am conceited; I fancy that I know a good thing when I see it.

I am weary of the difficulty of it. The game is not worth the candle; of course there is no question of throwing up the hand. It must be played out to the end

but it is the other men who hold the trumps and the prospect is not inspiriting.

I don't know what to say to your projected dedication.[1] Not that I feel averse to take the utmost from your affection. Generous as you are you can never give me enough; for of the proofs—such proofs—of such friendship one is insatiable as of the most real form of happiness. You've made me happy, and sad, and frightened; you've startled my secret dream as the report of the first gun may interrupt a dream of battle. *Vouz avez remué le plus profond de mon âme.* Never have I felt less worthy as now when my name is to be borne on the stream of time with your wife's achievement and your criticism. Is it possible that I should deserve to stand so close to the great creator, to his great interpreter and to the man who, in this country, alone had penetrated the Master. But you have said it and I can only bow my head before this fabulous good fortune.

When you send me that volume ask your dear wife to write her name in it for me. I almost think I understand better than any one all the perfection of her finished task. That is why I said Interpreter and not translator. She is in that work what a great musician is to a great composer—with something more, something greater. It is as if the Interpreter had looked into the very mind of the Master and had a share in his inspiration. I had letters about your Nietzsche

[1] The translation of Turgenev's *A Desperate Character*. (Heinemann, 1899) was dedicated to Joseph Conrad.

from all sorts of people. You have stirred some brains! I don't think there's anything wrong with *your* wits. Galsworthy brought the *Outlook* the other day and began to read aloud from your Ibsen. He read a couple of pars. and asked—Now who's this? I said Garnett or the devil. At that time I had no idea you wrote for that paper with a horrid caste-mark on its forepage. I am taking it in now. You never even *tell* me what *you* are doing. As to *Jim*.[1] I entreat you: Wait till the 2d inst. comes out (in a few days) and I shall send you the two together. The first is too bad to stand alone. The fifth (and last inst) is not written yet—and what it will be God only knows.

When! Oh when! shall we speak face to face?

The news about the Patron is grave.[2] Is it grave? Surely you—you! are wanted in too many places to bother much about the placing of your wits. I keep mum but let me know the finality of this thusness.

Ever yours

CONRAD

Jessie sends her love. We are in fair health.

Pent Farm Stanford, Near Hythe Kent 9th Nov 99

Dear Edward.

I've written the required letter but it can't go till tomorrow morning's post. I've also written

[1] *Lord Jim.*

[2] Mr. Fisher Unwin dispensed with my services as his literary adviser at the end of 1899.

privately to *Mel*[d] preparing him for Mrs Blake's[1] visit—probably on Monday; and in a note to the lady herself I advise her to call on Monday.

My dear fellow I don't know how to thank you for all you say in your critical letter anent *Lord Jim*. Of the faults you point out I've been aware all along, but that the thing had any good at all in it I vow and declare I was ignorant. The faults are mine and the good (since you say there is some good in it) comes from devil knows whence. Well! As long as it *is* there.

Turg[v]. in the Academy is rather so so. Who wrote it? And who are your wife's *associates*?!! She had not any . . . The people who wrote me about your Nietzsche were Sauter (a German painter) and Mrs Helen Sanderson a Scotch girl of great intelligence. She was immensely struck. Wells also said something appreciative at the time. The *pub*[s] *are* fools. B'wood is fussing now over a fraud called ——. Asked me to give him my opinion of that unspeakable impostor's story in the . . . *Maga*. And I did give it to him too. I said it was too contemptible to be thought about and moreover that it was stolen from Kipling as to matter and imitated from Munro as to style. I *couldn't* keep my temper.

Ever yours

Conrad

[1] A lady who had written sketches of Rhodesian life.

13 *Nov* 99

Dearest Edward.

I am delighted to hear of the critical book—and more interested than I can say. At last! At last! I am sure it will attract attention if not extract shekels. Only you must not have me there. An article in a weekly that's dead as soon as it's born does not matter—but in a book you must not give anybody an opening to impugn your judgement. No! Not even to serve me who am your spoiled child. I've no place in literature though I may have one in your affection. Be original—be *awakening* as much as you like, but be also guarded as to what material you use to develop upon your theory and practice of criticism. Deal with people that are *unquestionable* in this your first book of criticism. Reject dubious personalities (like me)—even if in your conscience they are deserving. Afterwards! Well! You'll do what you like and may even cram *me* down their narrow gullets. But now think only of E. G. and of E. G. alone—of what E. G. stands for to us who have heard him, who know him —and of what he may stand for even for the wise man in the street, who is instructed, shocked and amused by innumerable swarms of geniuses.

I shall send Bridges this week; also the titles of all your books now staying with me. Your question about the *Rescue* sent a shiver down my back. *Jim's* dragging

his slow length along—*après*—*nous verrons*. Annihilation perhaps. I repeat: *Nous verrons!*

Love from us to you both

Ever yours

CONRAD

Pent Farm Stanford, Near Hythe Sunday (*November* 19 1899.)

Dearest Edward.

I send you the vol. of Bridges. It is not yours. I find I can't lay my hands on it so I got a paper copy meanwhile.

I shall send you titles of others in a day or so.

I also send you 2d inst of *Jim*—which is too wretched for words. It would have been less shocking if it had included another chapter.

Meldrum wrote saying he shall report on Mrs Blake's work to old B'wood forthwith. I hope it will come off.

Ever yours

CONRAD

Pent Farm Stanford, Near Hythe Kent Friday evening
(*November* 24. 1899.)

Dearest Edward,

The letter to McClure goes by tomorrow morning's post. I play the honest broker to the best of my ability. I've said all you wished me to say; and as I remember perfectly that you did rather "choke

off" poor little Robert at the time I suggested that at a hint from me you would approach him on the matter. (At the same time I send him your address).

Robert is perfectly harmless; knows nothing of literature; is proud of the success of the firm but is not *low minded*. Simply ignorant. Of Doubleday the world has heard in connection with Kipling's pneumonia. That's enough!

S. S. McClure is a sort of Holy Terror—I hear but *why* he is terrible I'm damned if I know. Sort of Silas Lapham I understand. I dare say he is no more beastly than any other animal of that sort—nor more intelligent; nor more stupid. He has *made* the business. Personally I've found Robert very nice, extremely decent—not more so than Pawling—and rather deferential. And this is all I know of them.

You are a dear good old critic—you are! You've a way of saying things that would make an old sign-post take to writing. You put soul and spunk into me—you, so to speak, bamboozle me into going on—and going on and going on. You can detect the shape of a mangled idea and the shadow of an intention in the worst of one's work—and you make the best of it. You would almost persuade me that I exist. Almost!

Love to you all from us all

Ever yours

Joseph Conrad

Pent Farm Stanford Near Hythe 2 Dec 99

My dear Edward.

I was on the point of sitting down to write to you yesterday when a despairing note from poor Hope informed me that his eldest boy Jack was drowned. Jess and I started at once to see them. We spent two hours in Stanford and returned home feeling horribly wretched and tired. There's no doubt the poor boy had been murdered on the marshes not far from the place where you and I looked upon the river. They found him in the creek.

I am too upset to be able to write you a connected letter. I wanted to thank you for the volume[1] you've sent me. The preface is *jolly good* let me tell you. It is wonderfully good—and true. Thanks to you both. I want to catch the post.

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

[1] *A Desperate Character*, by Ivan Turgenev. Translated by Constance Garnett. Heinemann, 1899.

1900

Pent Farm Stanford Near Hythe 15 *Jan* 1900

Dearest Edward.

Thanks for the vol of Turg.[1] I haven't yet looked in.

I shall send you the B'woods only[2] I am trying to collect all the stray proofs so as to send you a lot of copy, since you won't wait till it is finished.

Our love to you three

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

Tell me what are your plans? Ford has been talking about some weekly paper. Is there anything in it.

Times are deucedly hard here. But it's no use talking. This imbecile war has just about done for me.

Pent Farm, 20 *Jan.* 1900.

Dearest Edward,

You make my head whirl when you write like this. What a letter for a poor devil to get! You've knocked my evening's work on the head; I found it impossible to write any copy. You frighten me; because

[1] "*The Jew*, etc., by Ivan Turgenev. Translated by Constance Garnett. Heinemann, 1900."

[2] Conrad's letter is a reply to an inscription in the presentation copy of *The Jew* from E. G.: "*An Unhappy Girl* is the most remarkable in psychology. *Enough* is very like the philosophy of your novels. Send me the Dec. & Jan. Blackwood, please. I return you the Nov. Number. Ever yours, E.G."

were I to let you take me up on these heights by your appreciation the fall before my own conscience's smile would be so heavy as to break every bone in my body. And yet what, oh! what would become of me if it were not for your brave words that warm like fire and feed like bread and make me drunk like wine!

No. I didn't know anything about *Jim*; and all I know now is that it pleases you; and I declare as true as there are blind, deaf-mute gods sitting above us (who are so clear-eyed; eloquent and sharp of hearing) I declare it is enough for me; for if you think that because I've not been sending you my MS., your opinion has ceased to be a living factor in my individual and artistic existence, you are lamentably mistaken. I was simply afraid. And I am afraid still. You see the work fragmentarily; and the blessed thing is so defective that even that far within it you can not possibly (with all your penetration and sympathy) you cannot possibly know where I tend and how I shall conclude this most inconclusive attempt. You don't; and the truth is that it is not my depth but my shallowness which makes me so inscrutable (?). Thus, (I go cold to think) the surprize reserved for you will be in the nature of a chair withdrawn from under one; something like a bad joke—it will strike you no doubt. Bad and vile. Now had you taken the whole thing the fall would not have been so heavy, I imagine.

There has been a *John Kochanowski* a 15th century poet who wrote a threnody amongst other things and

really our literature dates from him. Of course his name is no more like mine than Brown is like Robinson. His name is derived from the word which in Polish means *love* while mine derives from the word *root*.

Then in the thirties of the 19th century (or forties) there was a novelist of about say—Trollope's rank (but not so good in his way) named *Joseph Korzeniowski* That is also my name but the family is different, my full name being Joseph Theodor Konrad *Natęcz* Korzeniowski, the underlined word being the appellation of our trade mark as thus (SEAL HERE) ≡ Natęcz without which none are genuine. As a matter of fact I and Alfred Borys Konrad Korzeniowski are the only two of that particular brand of Korzeniowski in existence. There are other families whose arms are like mine but whose names are altogether different. This is a distinct *bond*—though not a relationship in any sense. It may indicate a common origin lost in the mists of ages? It was always recognised as a title to good offices from a powerful family towards a humbler one—and so on.

My paternal grandfather Theodor N. Korzeniowski served in the cavalry. Decorated with the cross of 'Virtuti Militari' (a plain white enamel with a green wreath of laurel and these words in the centre) something in the nature of V.C. Attained the rank of captain in 1830 when the Russo-Polish war occurred after which the so-called Polish Army ceased to exist. Two wounds. Retired to a little hereditary estate adjoining the extensive possessions of the family of

Sobánski (they are in the Almanach de Gotha) great friends and I fancy distant relations. Administered the territorial fortune of Madame Melanie Sobariska. Wrote a tragedy in 5 Acts, Verse, privately printed, and so extremely dull that no one was ever known to have read it through. I know I couldn't notwithstanding my family pride and the general piety of my disposition.

My other grandfather *Joseph Bobrowski* landowner, man of wit, owner of a famous stud of Steppe horses, lived and died on his estate of Oratów; popular, greatly lamented. Never wrote but letters (and very few of these) and a large number of promissory notes dedicated to various Jews. Left a large family of sons and one daughter *Eva*—my mother. There was an extraordinary Sister-Cult in that family from which I profited when left an orphan at the age of ten. And my mother certainly was no ordinary woman. Her correspondence with my father and with her brothers which in the year 1890 I have read and afterwards destroyed was a revelation to me; I shall never forget my delight, admiration and unutterable regret at my loss, (before I could appreciate her) which only then I fully understood. One of her brothers Thaddeus to whom I stand more in the relation of a son than of a nephew was a man of powerful intelligence and great force of character and possessed an enormous influence in the Three Provinces (Ukraïne, Volhynia and Podolia). A most distinguished man. Another *Stephen* was in 1862 chief of the Polish Revolutionary Com-

EVELINA KORZENIOWSKI, CONRAD'S MOTHER

mittee in Warsaw, and died assassinated soon after the Polish outbreak of 1863.

None of the members of the many families to which these two are related was a literary man; all made sacrifices of fortune, liberty and life for the cause in which they believed; and very few had any illusions as to its success.

My father Apollonius N. Korzeniowski. Educated in the University of St. Petersburg. Department of Oriental Studies and Philology. No degree. Debts. Social successes and any amount of "bonnes fortunes". Poet. Married in 1855. Came to Warsaw in 1860. Arrested in 1862 and after 10 months detention in the Citadel condemned to deportation into Russia. First in Archangel, then in Tshernigow. My mother died in exile. My father liberated in '67 on the representation of Prince Gallitzin that he was no longer dangerous. He was dying. Comedy in 5 acts in verse of modern life (date about 1854). Trans: V. Hugo, *Legende du Siècles. Travailleurs de la Mer. Hernani.* Alf. de Vigny Chatterton. Drama. (Verse) Shakespeare. *Much Ado About Nothing. As you Like it. Two Gentlemen of Verona. Comedy of Errors. Othello.* (These I remember seeing in proofs when sent for his correction. There may have been others. Some of these I've read when I could be no more than eight or nine years old.) After his liberation, in Cracow (Austrian Poland), one of the Editorial Committee of a Newspaper (Kraj) then founded if I remember rightly by Prince Leo

Sapieha (?) but too ill to continue actively in the direction.

A man of great sensibilities; of exalted and dreamy temperament; with a terrible gift of irony and of gloomy disposition; withal of strong religious feeling degenerating after the loss of his wife into mysticism touched with despair. His aspect was distinguished; his conversation very fascinating; his face in repose sombre, lighted all over when he smiled. I remember him well. For the last two years of his life I lived alone with him—but why go on?

There were piles of MS. Dramas, verse, prose, burnt after his death according to his last will. A friend of his a Polish critic of distinction wrote a pamphlet entitled "A little known Poet" after his death. And so finis.

Have I written enough? I certainly did not mean to write so much, when I began. I always intended to write something of the kind for Borys, so as to save all this from the abyss a few years longer. And probably he wouldn't care. What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba. Tempi passati, brother! Tempi passati. Let them go.

Ever yours,

Jph. Conrad

The Pent 26 *March* 1900

Dearest Edward.

All my bits of luck come through you! You must be indeed—as Jess says—the best of men.

I consider the accept: of the *Inh*^{ors}[1] a distinct bit of luck. Jove! What a lark!

I set myself to look upon the thing as a sort of skit upon the sort of political(?!) novel, fools of the N.S. sort do write. This in my heart of hearts. And poor *H.* was dead in earnest! Oh Lord. How he worked! There is not a chapter I haven't made him write twice —most of them three times over.

This is collaboration if you like! Joking apart the expenditure of nervous fluid was immense. There were moments when I cursed the day I was born and dared not look up at the light of day I had to live through with this thing on my mind. H. has been as patient as no angel had ever been. I've been fiendish. I've been rude to him; if I've not called him names I've *implied* in my remarks and the course of our discussions the most opprobrious epithets. He wouldn't recognise them. 'Pon my word it was touching. And there's no doubt that in the course of that agony I have been ready to weep more than once. Yet not for him. Not for him.

You'll have to burn this letter—but I shall say no more. Some day we shall meet and then—!

I am still at *Jim.* I've been beastly ill in Feb^{ry}. Jessie is hunting all over the house for the *Feb^{ry} No* to send you. I am old and sick and in debt—but lately I've found I can still write—*it* comes! *it* comes! —and I am young and healthy and rich.

[1] *The Inheritors* which I had recommended Heinemann to publish.

The question is *will* I ever *write* anything?

I've been cutting and slashing whole pars out of *Jim*. How bad oh! HOW BAD! Why is it that a weary heaven has not pulverised me with a wee little teeny weeny thunderbolt?

Love from us to you three. I shall write again when I get time to gasp once or twice.

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

I suppose you've scornfully detected whole slabs of my own precious writing in that precious novel?[1]

Pent Farm Stanford, Near Hythe Kent Friday [*Nov* 1900]

Dearest E.

What Meldrum[2] says is this:

He is most anxious to see (what he calls) your essay in criticism[3] but lately he was greatly annoyed by having one or two things he sent to E'gh, refused. He thinks it deplorable to ask a man for stuff, then have it fired back after 3 weeks, or more.

Consequently were you to send anything he would be delighted and do all he can with alacrity but says he

[1] *The Inheritors*.

[2] Mr. D. S. Meldrum was then connected with the publishers, Blackwood & Sons.

[3] The "Contemporary Critic."

—I am unwilling to ask E. G. in so many words and then hear that his work has been refused.

As to George B'wood from few words I've exchanged with him I fancy the idea has a fearful fascination for him. They step delicately round you as though you were a box of dynamite they would like to pick up but daren't. It's most impressive. If I talk much more about you with that lot I'll get frightened myself. It seems to me you do not realise this extraordinary prestige you possess—the prestige of a quiescent bomb about whose deadly quality there is no doubt whatever. All these priests of imbecile idols seem to think that you may go off—if given a chance—and shatter their commodious temple to pieces.

May you do so! To me you are not a bomb—you are a righteous club which I imagine forever suspended over my head. And I don't think you realise either how much this conception of E. G. influences the course of my existence.

If you've written to me about L. J.[1] keep back your letter for a week. I am in a state bordering on distraction. Most unhappy about it and yet idiotically exalted. I want to settle down before I hear what you have to say—for to me it is your voice that really matters.

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

[1] *Lord Jim.*

Pent Farm, Stanford, Near Hythe, Kent. 12. *Nov.* 1900.

Dearest E.

You are great and good.

Yes! you've put your finger on the plague spot. The division of the book[1] into two parts which is the basis of your criticism demonstrates to me once more your amazing insight; and your analysis of the effect of the book puts into words precisely and suggestively the dumb thoughts of every reader—and my own.

Such is indeed the effect of the book; the effect which you can name and others can only feel. I admit I stood for a great triumph and I have only succeeded in giving myself utterly away. Nobody'll see it, but you have detected me falling back into my lump of clay I had been lugging up from the bottom of the pit, with the idea of breathing big life into it. And all I have done was to let it fall with a silly crash.

For what is fundamentally wrong with the book—the cause and the effect—is want of power. I do not mean the 'power' of reviewers' jargon. I mean the want of illuminating imagination. I wanted to obtain a sort of lurid light out (of) the very events. You know what I have done—alas! I haven't been strong enough to breathe the right sort of life into my clay—the *revealing* life.

I've been satanically ambitious, but there's nothing of a devil in me, worse luck. The *Outcast* is a heap of

[1] *Lord Jim.*

sand, the *Nigger* a splash of water, *Jim* a lump of clay. A stone, I suppose will be my next gift to the impatient mankind—before I get drowned in mud to which even my supreme struggles won't give a simulacrum of life. Poor mankind! Drop a tear for it—but look how infinitely more pathetic I am! This pathos is a kind of triumph no criticism can touch. Like the philosopher who crowed at the Universe I shall know when I am utterly squashed. This time I am only very bruised, very sore, very humiliated.

This is the effect of the book upon me; the intimate and personal effect. Humiliation. Not extinction. Not yet. All of you stand by me so nobly that I must still exist. There is *You*, always, and never dismayed. I had an amazing note from Lucas. Amazing! This morning a letter came from Henry James. Ah! You rub in the balm till every sore smarts—therefore I exist. The time will come when you shall get tired of tending true and most well-intentioned sham—and then the end'll come too.

But keep up! keep up! Let me exhort you earnestly to keep up! as long as you can.

I send you the H. J. letter. A draught from the Fountain of Eternal Youth. Wouldn't you think a boy had written it? Such enthusiasm! Wonderful old man, with his record of wonderful work! It is, I believe, seriously intended (the letter) as confidential. And to you alone I show it—keep *his* secret for us both. No more now. I've read *Petersburg Tales*.[1] Phew! That *is*

[1] "*Petersburg Tales*, by Olive Garnett. Heinemann, 1900."

something. That is many things—and the only thing —it is written! It is. That work is genuine, undeniable, constructed and inhabited. It hath foundation and life. I hope the writer will deign to recognise my most fraternal welcome!

Yours ever

J. C.

P.S.

Pray send the James autograph back—registered. Our great love to you three. We *must* meet soon.

1901–1904

Pent Farm Stanford, Near Hythe Kent 3rd July 1901.

Dearest Edward.

Am I to understand that, like the hero of the *Inheritors*, you have fallen amongst the Dimensionists and are about to become an interviewer? Then I must be the Great Callan—who, Pawling says, must be meant for Crockett.[1] And so be it.

But to see you, and to see you here, I am ready to turn myself into a Callan. I believe Fox paid Granger's expenses, so Pawling can't do less than buy you a return ticket for Sandling. But come under pretence and whatever cost and help me to inherit the earth before I die. There is no time to lose.

I feel as if I were asking you to come and see the last of me. A sort of invincible oppression bears me down and whether it is the mind or the body that is suffering it is literally—all one. It is a bad sign—and a great sadness.

Ever yours

Joseph Conrad

P.S. I came up to London on Monday, calculating I would see you at the oar in your galley. Our love to you three—

[1] S. R. Crockett, author of *The Raiders*, etc.

The Pent 4th August 1901

My dear Edward.

We have been very much shocked at the awful catastrophe of which I've read without ever dreaming it touched your wife so close.[1] Pray assure her of our most affectionate sympathy. I would like exceedingly to see you both and may try to come over but things are damnably bad with me anyhow— Your stuff[2] is absolutely right, interesting, first rate, written judiciously and excellently well in tone with Maga. in her unpolitical mood. I of course am completely convinced by this preliminary exposé and have the greatest confidence in what is to come. And without flattery I am interested and eager to see more of it. The thing goes on most felicitously as to phrasing, is developed with a pleasing assurance. Here, you feel, is a man who knows what he is writing. A sort of air of meditation broods over it all and is positively seductive. What Blackwood may think I don't know and am not enough of a devil to guess at. I've sent off tonight the MS. of the first instalment with a pressing letter of mine advocating not so much the man (you) as the expounder of opinions views and feelings very near my own heart, but which I could never hope to express with anything like such certitude and effect. (This because B. had hinted *I* would be acceptable in

[1] The death of Robert Black, M.D., and of two friends by a mountaineering accident in Switzerland.

[2] *The Contemporary Critic.*

critical wandering which is all I am capable of). I've also warned Meldrum who I am sure will do what's right by your copy. I mentioned that you are leaving [Heinemann] for good in a short time.

I've been unable to think but the writing has not been the easier for that. Tell good old Ford that he is not utterly undone as yet by the Fatal Partnership, but there is gathering a pretty lot of material for a sombre drama of the literary-domestic order—which he may have an opportunity to write and make his fortune thereby.

My love to all the houseful

Always yours

CONRAD

Monday evening [*April 5*. 1901].

Dearest Edward.

Last night I posted you a letter care of Hueffer who will no doubt forward. We did not know Dr Black was your wife's brother till Hueffer wrote. We were greatly shocked but as at the same time Ford said you were coming directly to Winchelsea I did not write to the Cearne. One never has anything to say unless one is completely and stonily indifferent. Assure your wife of our profound sympathy—and we are concerned about her health. It must have been a cruel shock. Drop us a line because Jess imagines that you delay the visit to W. on account of your wife's unsatisfactory state. I trust not.

The MS. went off to E'gh on Saturday evening, backed by a letter to B. pressing for immediate consideration not so much on account of my interest in your work as in the views expressed with which I am in complete accord and could never hope to put forward in a manner so effective and fundamental. I wrote in that strain just because B. has been asking me to contribute some critical views—and so this pins him down so to speak. I've also warned Meldrum who is friendly and is sure to put his shoulder to the coach if B. sticks in the mud of hesitation with it. My impressions I have put down in the other letter to you and here only say emphatically First rate! Get on with the IId instalment. It is the right thought, the right tone, the right words.

Ever yours

J. C.

PS

Of course it is impossible to guess how it'll strike B. I build my hopes on the judicial tone. Anyway speak with authority! I mean—force the note of it. *That* is your line. You do it so well. And after all you have the right to be magistral. You *know*!

Wednesday [*August* 7. 1901.]

My dearest Edward.

I've written to B—saying that the end of the paper shall be ready next week and'll reach him through my hands.

The fact is my dear fellow that if the machine runs stiffly (as *you* say—because no creaking is audible in part I) it is because of dis-use, of non-use. The raw thought is with you—valuable, weighty, informed by sensitive feeling and justice, flowing from instinct and therefore the more valuable. The distilling apparatus may be clogged as to pipes, but it has only to be kept at work to clear itself. Meantime no one would guess or suspect that there is anything the matter.

I repeat: the authoritative attitude is the attitude for you. Every truth requires some pretence to make it live. Let this be your pretence, your pose. Speak magistrally no matter how you may feel.

I am with you, in thought, during every spare minute, but with all my hopefulness I don't find anything really convincing to say. So vale

Ever yours

CONRAD

[*August.* 1901.]

Dearest Edward,

. . . I think that it would be impolitic to spring upon B'wood the 2d version. The fact is that the first version gave me a very favourable impression —and at any rate since you leave the decision to me I simply dare not interfere now. The paper as a whole is very good. I consider the first version of part II simply too short but in no other way defective. I regretted a certain lack of development. You should have spread

your elbows more—taken room, spoken louder. Now the 2d version of part II is even shorter than the first version. On that ground alone (the thing being left to me) I would refrain from putting it before B'wood. We want weight, volume, a more opulent roll of your particular thunder—that's how I feel.

I write as I think. Of course if you instruct me definitely to forward the 2d version I shall do so at once and write to B'wood in the sense suggested in your letter. Only I repeat: we had better not.

I trust they won't keep us in suspense very long but the method of their madness is leisurely.

Love to you all

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

Friday [*August* 23. 1901.]

Dearest Edward.

I am bitterly disappointed at B'wood refusing your paper. The act seems to me unqualifiable; neither does he qualify it getting off the track with vague civilities. One can only say "damn!"

I haven't the heart to say anything else, besides mentioning that the addition of the matter you sent me last would not, as far as I can see, have influenced the issue of this attempt.

I shall send you the MS. by the next post. You may work at it a little; but I despair of the current intelligence which nothing seems capable of stirring. It is

like a viscous pool. Things at most can fall into it, and be lost, and give no ripple.[1] Is it worth throwing things into it? Love to you all

Ever yours

CONRAD

10*th June* 1902

Dearest Edward.

In so far as writing goes I hardly dare look you in the face. Why do you introduce the name of Pinker into your letter? It is almost indelicate on your part. The times indeed are changed—and all my art has become artfulness in exploiting agents and publishers.

I am simply afraid to show you my work; and as to writing about it—this I can't do. I have now lost utterly all faith in myself, all sense of style, all belief in my power of telling the simplest fact in a simple way. For no other way do I care now. It is an unattainable way. My expression has become utterly worthless: it is time for the money to come rolling in.

The Blackwood vol. shall be coming out in two three months: *Youth Heart of Dark*[88] and a thing I am trying to write now called the *End of the Tether*—an inept title to heartbreaking bosh. Pawling's vol. shall follow at a decent interval; four stories of which *Typhoon* is first and best. I am ashamed of them all; I don't believe either in their popularity or in their

[1] Such was the fate of the essay, *The Contemporary Critic.*

merit. Strangely enough it is yet my share of *Romance* (collab^{on} stuff with Ford) that fills me with the least dismay. My mind is becoming base, my hand heavy, my tongue thick—as though I had drunk some subtle poison, some slow poison that will make me die, die as it were without an echo. You understand?

I am always coming to you and some day I shall appear. I don't suppose you are angry with me; for in truth where would be the sense of expending your fine stock of indignation upon such a base wretch.

The other day I ran into Duckth to try and see you. No luck.

Remember me affectionately to your wife whose trans. of *Karenina* is splendid. Of the thing itself I think but little, so that her merit shines with the greater lustre. Jessie joins me in our love to you all. We talk of your boy very often. Oh! my dear dear fellow I am so very disgusted with my mental impotence, so afraid of my hollowness—so weary—deadly weary of writing!

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

Thursday [*August.* 1902]

Dearest Edward.

I was glad to see your handwriting and am excitedly interested in the venture. But what *great of the world* do you imagine I have under my roof—Great buzzing flies, fine large wasps—these are my

visitors which make a noise in the world. I see no one from month to month. Four or five months ago G. B. S. towed by Wells came to see me reluctantly and I nearly bit him. Since then—barring Ford there has been no one.

I am trying to rewrite the story *End of Tether* which (perhaps you've heard) has been burnt when completed. The weariness and disgust of that awful toil nearly kills me every day; just leaving breath enough in me every evening to feel the utter misery, the complete foolishness of the undertaking.

How can one believe in one's story when it has to be written for the second time—and if one does not believe how is one to write? Imagine trying to clothe in flesh a naked skeleton, without the faith to help you in the impossible task! Enough.

Our love to you all

Ever yours

CONRAD

P.S.

Galsworthy is coming today. I had not seen *him* for 3 months.

Winchelsea. 17 *Oct.* 1902.

Dearest Edward,

When the book[1] arrived I had been up two nights trying to finish my Bl'wood story[2] to time. It was a matter of life and death as it were for other-

[1] *The Art of Winnifred Matthews.* By E. G. Duckworth, 1902.
[2] *The End of the Tether.*

wise I would have missed an instalment. I had neither the time nor even the right to look at the book in this hurry and mental stress. I had 3 hours' sleep for two nights and for the third no sleep at all going to bed as I am in a state. I may describe it as frenetic idiocy.

To-day I am recovering. This evening I shall read the study.

I had urged Wells to order the book before I had your letter. I did not know it was to appear so soon however. Besides my dear fellow with this miserable [affair] I was not conscious of the days passing and did not know whether the sun shone. We are staying here till Monday or Tuesday next.

With love to you all.

Ever yours CONRAD

Pent Farm Stanford, Near Hythe Kent 27 Nov. [1902]

Dearest Edward.

I am glad you review me in the *Academy*, and I am sorry you had the bother. Somehow it never occurred to me that mine would go to you. I am in luck if you are not.

I sent you two the copy as soon as I got it. They were late in sending them to me; then I, myself, lost a day.

Horrible! Horrible! I am like Philip IV—I am overwhelmed: he however was overwhelmed by the death of Velasquez while I am overcome [by the sight of my]

three-headed monster in the green cover.[1] I hate the sight of the thing.

How's David? His books are on the way to me to be inscribed.

Our love to you.

Pent Farm Stanford, Near Hythe Kent 22 *Dec.* 1902.

Dearest Edward,

I've just finished a long letter to David introducing my old friend Cooper. I am quite excited at the result of the experiment. Will they hit it off together? That's the question.

With my usual brutality I've neglected to express my feelings very much awakened by your review of *Youth*.[2]

How nice they are I renounce to tell. My dearest fellow you quite overcome me. And your brave attempt to grapple with the foggishness of *H. of D*,[3] to explain what I myself have tried to shape blindfold, as it were, has touched me profoundly. You are the Seer of the Figures in the Carpet. The Figure in the Carpet of the *E. of this T*.[4] you have seen so perfectly and described in a line and a half with so much precision that even to me it has been a sort of revelation.

Thanks and thanks again.

[1] *Youth. A Narrative and Two Other Stories.* Blackwood, 1902.
[2] *The Academy*, Dec. 1902.
[3] *Heart of Darkness.*
[4] *The End of the Tether.*

The ruck takes its tone from you. You know how to serve a friend! I notice the reviews as they come in since your article. *Youth* is an epic: that's settled. And the *H. of D.* is this and that and the other thing—they aren't so positive because in this case they aren't intelligent enough to catch on to your indications. But anyhow its a high water mark. If it hadn't been for you it would have been, dreary bosh—an incoherent bogie tale. Yes. That note too was sounded only you came just in time. As to the *E. of T.*[1] you have seen the Figure—but the miserable thread-bare warp and woof of the thing had fascinated them already. They didn't want you there. Touching, tender, noble, moving. . . . Let us spit!

However the *Manchester Guardian* was fairly intelligent—and, I suppose, you have seen the thawing of great snows on the hoary summits of the Athenaeum? I am still shaking at the august phenomenon.

J. Bl'wood sent me word that the thing sells decently and that if the Christmas does not kill it or if . . .

It's strange how I always, from the age of fourteen, disliked the Christian religion, its doctrines, ceremonies and festivals. Presentiment that some day it will work my undoing, I suppose. Now it's quite on the cards that the Bethlehem legend will kill the epic, and the bogie tale, and the touching, tender, noble captain Newcome—Colonel Whalley thing. Hard. Isn't it? And the most galling feature is that nobody—not

[1] *The End of the Tether.*

a single Bishop of them—believes in it. The business in the stable isn't convincing; whereas my atmosphere (vide reviews) can be positively breathed.

Our festive greetings, love and best wishes

Ever yours

CONRAD

Pent Farm Stanford, near Hythe Kent 22 *Dec.* [1902]

[To David Garnett.]

My dear boy,

We have sent off three volumes of the "Leather-Stocking Tales"—one from each of us—with our love to you.

You have promised me to read these stories and I would recommend you to begin with the *Last of the Mohicans*—then go on with the *Deerslayer* and end with the *Prairie*. I read them at your age in that order; and I trust that you, of a much later generation, shall find in these pages some at least of the charm which delighted me then and has not evaporated even to this day.

Thirty four years ago is a long long time to look back upon. And then already these stories were not of the day before; now the arrangement of their words has grown old—they say—very old.

It may be. Time spares no one. Even you shall grow old some day. But I have a great confidence in you; and I believe that you shall respond—as I did in

my time—to the genuine feeling of the descriptions and the heroic temper of the narrative.

Your affectionate friend

JOSEPH CONRAD

Pent Farm Stanford, Near Hythe Kent 13 May. 1903.

Dearest Edward.

Many thanks for your letter. I've read it with attention and I fancy I quite take hold of the thought enshrined therein. But may be I don't. I can be colossally stupid and without any great effort either—I am indeed in that way equipped to go very far.

The bicycle news *is* good news; don't wait for the distant date you fix but snatch a run when the spirit moves you with the shortest of wires for a herald. I am here fixed to slave and groan for months. Harpers got the book[1] of which *not a quarter* yet is written. I am indeed appalled at myself when I think what rotten contemptible bosh it must and shall be. By Jove I am too tired and with a heart worn too threadbare to be honest.

Love from all us to you and your house. If the boy cycles too *bring him along*.

Ever yours

CONRAD

[1] *Nostromo*.

Pent Saturday [*March* 1904]

Dearest Edward.

I am very sorry but I had a distinct impression of having written to say we were coming to London. Please forgive me this time.

If I haven't seen you I've seen no one else either Dawson did turn up once for an hour and, yes—Cunninghame Graham who invited himself to the Pent and had to be told we were coming up on the very day he proposed for his visit.

I tried to write (and finish) an imbecile sort of story[1] in that time. It is very imbecile but it isn't finished yet.

If I did better work, more of it and a little easier you would see me often enough. As it is I am shy of inflicting myself upon my friends. I go about oppressed, severely irritated against my works, never free from it, never satisfied with it. Not a man of profit or pleasure for his friends.

But it's too difficult to explain. I can only ask you to believe in my very steady affection for you and all yours. You are much more with me than you suspect. All unconscious you check and sometimes urge my pen. It's a fact.

Ever yours

Conrad

[1] *Nostromo.*

6th July 1904

My dear Edward.

Ecco-là. Here's your A.F.[1] in proof of my affection. Two nights and the morning of today. Isn't it miserable! Isn't it miserable to have to work in fetters and bound and gagged as it were by the irresolution and sluggishness of one's intellect, by a difficulty of saying the simplest thing.

Measure then my affection for you. But how to give you an idea of my disaffection towards the whole body of Editors I am at a loss. The best way would be to suggest that the malefactor conducting the *Speaker* should give me 5 gns for these pages. Explain to him that this is the price of my conscience for abetting him in his weekly crime. Had his crime been daily £10 per thou. would have been my figure. Console him by the remark that he shall not have J.C. in his page in the future at that or any other conceivable price. Strengthen his faint soul by pointing out that the thing is low down and commonplace enough to please the divine mediocrity of the only god he knows—his public. Tell him these wholesome and fortifying truths in order that his constitution should be braced up for the extraction of 5 gns. *Comprenez-vous?* This is a matter of principle.

For the rest I won't insult your intelligence by stating in too many words that the thing is yours and wholly yours, written for you, meant for you to sell, or

[1] An article on "Anatole France." *The Speaker*, July 16, 1904.

give away, or light a fire with. *Comprenez-vous?* This is a matter of fact.

Other things I would like to stipulate are: that my heading should be preserved and if possible the article billed on posters. This is a matter of fancy.

Our best love to you in your domestic solitude. You should run down here for a night—for several nights. Who knows how long I shall last. The sands oh Brother are running out.

Ever yours

CONRAD

Pent Farm Stanford, Near Hythe Kent 3 *Sept* 1904

My dear Edward.

I drop you these lines just to say that *Nostromo* is finished; a fact upon which my friends may congratulate me as upon a recovery from a dangerour illness. Therefore I am writing to dear Jack Galsworthy, to you and—but there does not seem to be any more friends whose congratulations would be enlightened enough for such an occasion.

Your article in the Spectator[1] in which you beat a dummy with a stick called Rutherford[2] is, as an exercise in whacking, simply admirable. It is something more too, since it has made me take down from the shelf the *Revolution of Tanner's Lane.* Your stick my dear boy has a queer aspect of a medieval staff already. But it's good and more than good. It's precious wood of straight fibre and with a faint,

[1] *The Speaker* is meant. [2] Mark Rutherford.

delicate scent. But I regret the dissipation of your energy, the waste of vigour and the sound of divine blows lost in an unresonant medium. No dust is seen to fly. There is no dust, even, in the dummy. Not so much truth as there would be in a handful of dust. Nothing! For I have looked on the dummy too with a malicious pleasure and a melancholy curiosity. Alas. This is what we are all coming to—at least what I am coming to. A few days later I saw (and read) in the 'Standard' a warm and gentlemanly appreciation of the dumminess of your dummy. Amen! And I beheld the bald summit of my ambition. Some day I shall write a thing that'll be reviewed thus and not otherwise. Then in the dead of night, in the woods about the Cearne, wearing the cope and the pointed mitre of a High Priest, in the secrecy of a persecuted faith, by the light of a torch held by David clad in the white vestments—you shall bury my tame and impotent soul. You'll bury it alive—by God!—and go home smiling ironically, and sleep no more that night.

Meantime what do you think of the subject on the enclosed piece of paper?[1] Will the public stand it? Can my tact and sense of proprieties be trusted on that classical theme?

My love to you all Yours ever

J Conrad

P.S. Send me back the scrap please—with a word of how you are.

[1] This was a sketch of a Napoleonic subject.

[*To David Garnett*] 23*rd Dec* 1904

My dear David,

A man who makes maps[1]—even in imaginary countries—should have a compass; a pocket-compass to show him the way of his exploring.

The lenses are not first rate but Borys (whom you perhaps remember) got them specially for you. They may serve to examine a casual beetle or a blade of grass or a bit of moss that you may pick up in your wanderings in the woods—the deep woods of an imaginary country.

And with these insignificant tokens of our love we send you our best wishes for that uncertain and hazardous journey[2] upon which you are engaged now.

Your friend

Joseph Conrad

[1] David had made the map in a new edition of *Bevis* by Richard Jefferies. (Duckworth.)

[2] He was setting out for Russia with his mother.

1905–1907

Pent Farm Stanford, Near Hythe Kent 20th July 1905

Dearest Edward,

I am rather ashamed of the silly thing[1] I had to send to the *Speaker;* tho' I think that to say it contains all my philosophy of life is a severe hit. But I suppose you know best, for myself I don't know what my philosophy is. I wasn't even aware I had it. Am sorry to think I must have since you say so. Shall I die of it do you think?

Your article on Sagas first rate and extracts quoted are good. I quite see how one could get dramas out of that. I own I am much more interested in your drama[2] than in all the sagas that were ever written. I don't believe their merits are very peculiar but I do believe that you can make use of that quarry.

I am anxious to see if only one act of your play. I would keep it only one day and return it duly registered. Do let me have a look into the chamber of horrors of your brain.

I send you 2 papers by Norman. Pray do something.

[Rest missing]

[1] Article "Books," *The Speaker*, July 1905.

[2] *The Feud.*

Pent Farm Stanford Near Hythe Kent 8 *Nov.* 1906

My dear Edward

Thanks for your dear letter. I waited till now so as to finish my imbecile story before I spoke to you. The principal thing I have to say is that I want the plays *as soon as possible*—both plays. Send them at once my dear fellow: first because I am impatient to see them anyhow—but also for the reason that just now I am especially fit to read them with something approaching understanding. How long this blessed state will last I can't say.

But what about the performance? Where are you going to try? Remembering your sardonic retort "Hengler's Circus" I dare not air my theory of preaching to the Gentiles in the market place. And yet I feel that I'm not utterly wrong there. But perhaps it is impracticable—perhaps there is no market place open to us even for the purpose of having oyster shells and rotten eggs thrown at our heads. The more's the pity.

Jessie sends her dear love to you all. There's something wrong with her eyes just now. I am not at all easy about her.

My very affectionate regards to your wife. Remember me to your boy. We talk of him often here.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Pent Farm Stanford Near Hythe Kent [*November* 17. 1906.]

My dearest Edward.

I got the play[1] at 9 this morning. I've shut myself up with it at once and I won't come out of the room, I will see no one, will let no word or thing come between it and me till I've written to you.

The conduct of the action is simply admirable. I am using here the *exact* word. Admirable from an abstract point of view. Whether you (or anybody else) has the right (I don't mean the ethical right) to throw, in practice, that quintessence of tragedy at our heads (as it were) is another question. It is the quintessence of tragedy and also the quintessence of your really amazing talent for the stage. I know a little what writing is. We come to our work attuned by long meditation, prepared, in a way, for what is to come from under our pen, by the processes of our imagination and of our intelligence and temperamentally disposed (since it is our own work) to accept its necessity —its truth. I am putting to you stupidly what you know very well. But my point is this that I don't think, my dear fellow, you have realised the firmness of mind necessary to an audience who would face your play. If the phrase weren't idiotic I would say that the play is too concentrated. It hits one exactly like a bullet. You can see it coming—I admit—but that

[1] *The Breaking Point.* A Censured Play. By Edward Garnett. Duckworth & Co., 1907.

doesn't make it easier in the least. On the contrary, it prolongs the agony and brings on that feeling of *helplessness* which I think is fatal to the effect of the play.

The poignancy of things human lies in the alternative. Grace as conceived and presented by you may be true but her position is no longer poignant. From the moment we hear and see her in the wood all hope is over. It becomes obvious that nothing Sherr. can say or do is of the slightest use—unless indeed he were to tie her up hand and foot and carry her off in that way. And mind my dearest Edward you present this state of the girl as initial, fundamental. That's her character—you say. But don't think for a moment we remain indifferent. The effect is produced only too well. The effect is nightmarish. Whether you meant it to be so or not I don't know—but that's the effect. The doom is not hanging over her head. It has already fallen. And one feels that Sherr. is not the man to lift it. And what's not less important Sherr. too is presented to us initially as utterly hopeless. One feels him to be so. We are flung right into the middle of a situation that is already gone *too far*.

That's her character—you say. I have a certain difficulty in grasping it. You may tell me I don't know women—and it's very possible I don't. But to attempt a definition she is the incarnation of submissiveness, of a submissiveness so perfect that it is inconceivable why she should not go away with Sherr. when he asks her to do so and when it is absolutely

clear there is no alternative. One is driven to ask oneself *why* she had given herself to Sherrington? From love? But where's her love now? From simple submissiveness to the hand that took hold of her? But where is her submissiveness now? These considerations are extremely disturbing. They are the more so because one does not see *why* she should stick to her father like this. The man is not a terrible or a seductive personality. It seems no personality could be terrible or seductive enough in the situation as presented to us. Neither is he pathetically appealing. He is not pitiful, he is not lovable, he is not awful. Then why? Why this enslaved state? What keeps her chained so? Sense of duty—the strength of her affection? But you can't eat your cake and have it. If the sense of duty and the strength of affection are so terribly effective now where were they when she gave herself to Sherr'on? By the terms of the problem she could not have done so from passion—because passion which is not stronger than filial piety is not passion, it's some other thing of which I have no knowledge.

In its psychological origins the situation for me is enigmatical. If you meant to present to us a drama of conscience then I haven't understood your intention at all. That of course would be mainly my fault. But not altogether—because I am no more stupid than the audience would be. And this is a play for an audience distinctly triumphantly so. Ibsen himself has never written a play that was so much, so perfectly in its workmanship a play for the stage.

But what I want to point out here is the play's quality of hopelessness. At the end of the first act we feel that everything is over. I have felt it so strongly that I can't keep it to myself, I can't write of the play and omit saying so. It would be the merest hypocrisy. The attitude, the words of the girl at the end of Act Ist settle the whole business. And even Sherrington seems to think so too. You have every right to invite us to behold this woman perish. But the impression is that she is done for already and what we are to see is the mangling of her body. The play thus misses poignancy and becomes harrowing. It is so terribly harrowing that we want to take refuge in incredulity. We ask ourselves on purpose to ease our feelings: what sort of lover is that who (under these circumstances) can't persuade her. It's inconceivable that the girl should have given herself to him and then suddenly should have become so insensible to his words, to his anguish, to his person! It isn't fate. It seems more like a spell, a mysterious spell which holds them both. And one goes on asking, what—who—cast it on them. They are done for whatever happens, no matter what anybody does Mansell or Mrs. Sherrington. They have lost footing to begin with. Its difficult to express what I mean. I must try to do it by a concrete image. We are called to look at two people crossing a torrent—a mad rush of water—their chances are one in a thousand. We even feel that they *must* be swept off. We look at them. As long as they stand it is a poignant sight. Directly they are swept

off their feet the sight ceases to be poignant, anguishing, appealing. It becomes harrowing only. My dear Edward you are inviting us to see a harrowing sight. Their characters are such that they never had a footing. And that, frankly, is incomprehensible—at least to me. For I ask myself how on earth did they get so far into the bed of that torrent?

I come back to my idea that this is a drama of conscience so subtly balanced that it escapes my comprehension. But here I am faced by the difficulty of time. The position has lasted for some time. What brings on them the crisis of conscience. The word of the doctor? of a doctor! The assurance of that man. Then it's not conscience but funk. It can't be conscience since it is plain that it is the fact of being pregnant that affects her so. And here a sheer question of fact arises. Did she really want a doctor to tell her so? Why my dear Edward a girl so afraid of the plain issue would have been in a blue funk from the first—from the first fortnight. The doctor's assuring her that it was *not so* could not have assuaged her fears. One does not want to be a great expert in seduction to feel sure of that. And you represent her as doubting, absolutely doubting the word of the doctor while she is already in a state of pregnancy advanced enough for that man to form an opinion! I warn you solemnly that no man or woman in the auditorium will believe you for a moment. She was much more likely to rush out of the consulting room and to do away with herself there and then—since it is obvious she being "estab-

lished" as you "establish" her character — nothing on earth can matter. She's doomed by that funk lest the father should know. Because that's what it is. Mrs Sherr. arrival cannot possibly have anything to do with that denouement. It's simply a question of time. It's *that* which decides it: Sherr'on goes to *tell* her father—and she jumps into the river. But the thing in another two months shall become apparent anyhow—and she will jump into the river!

Thus this girl who can neither face her father nor her lover—faces death. Here my dear Edward I am controverting the psychology of that action—I am going to say elementary things. Girl mothers have committed suicide before in the history of mankind. They have. But never from the mere fear of parental wrath or tenderness to parental anguish. To maintain that is a negation not only of love but even of mere sensuality. The suicide follows the abandonment by the lover. It is comprehensible even as caused by parental wrath in the *absence* of the faithful lover—some accidental absence. But here the lover is at hand with his person, his voice, his entreaties, his devotion and his fidelity—with all the personal fascination of a man fascinating enough to have seduced *that* girl. She could not have loved him. Then why did she give herself to him?—After all it isn't the usual sort of thing in her sphere of life to go all that length out of mere casual kindness. But on the theory or reading of her character as temperamentally submissive perhaps neither the attack nor the defence were very

fierce. Very well. Then surely in that passive woman, in that acquiescent and timid soul the dread of parental wrath—or of the parental sorrow if you like—and the love for the man who had conquered her (from herself alone) would have counterbalanced each other giving her poor soul a sort of awful equilibrium. After Sherr. went away she would have sat there till father and lover came back to "tear her in two" as Mansell says. But to go out and drown herself—an act of energy anyhow—never. You make it go down, your art does it; but not for long. The arbitrariness of it causes a reaction. After that, come surprise—and doubt. You can't do the impossible.

A scene in which these two would be squabbling over her, the selfish, fatuously selfish father and that lover whose love could not move—I won't say a mountain, but a grain of sand—a scene in which they would be pulling her to and fro till she died in their hands, that is a scene my dear Edward which you could write, which you could *make* go down with tremendous effect —I am confident. And, you know, it would be quite conceivable; conceivable by the audience I mean. You are capable of that achievement.

As it is the going away of Sherrington remains inconceivable. Don't let us forget that he is her lover. He has her there. The thing is done. She has gone away from her father. All he has got now to do is to lock the doors and order the carriage. Why should he leave her alone to rush off and force himself upon the father. To what end? What can he expect? Bring

him to the girl? As the thing stands now I want to know why? In the first act he wanted her to go away from her father. That was the difficulty. Now she has done it—actually has done it. Run from her home to the house of her lover. He has got her; he has got his supreme chance. And he drops her! At first when Mansell tells him his wife had been to see the father (and as he does not know what she said there) it is comprehensible that he should rush over there to be at hand and take the girl away. But once Grace is with him there is no earthly reason that I can discover. And I am not particularly dense as a rule.

He could hardly have expected to get the old man's blessing. If he thought that the girl was going mad (and that's the first we hear of it) that was not the way to save her sanity. For if she was going mad with anything it was with the apprehension of her father *knowing*. It's a shock to see him rush off leaving her to her madness—to put his hand to it in fact.

It's absolutely marvellous tho' how for the time of the reading your skill of presentation makes one accept all this! But only for the time of reading. Directly afterwards one is positively assailed by all these questions, all these doubts and objections which do believe me I haven't sat to think out. They have rushed upon me, unexpected. And anything but welcome. They have rushed upon me with such a force that I cannot hold my tongue. There is no other man in the world to whom I would have written as I am writing to you now.

It is a magnificent subject. I entreat you my dear

Edward to put this play in the drawer for six months or so. Then consider my objections afresh. I may be wrong. But I am perfectly sincere; and in absolute sincerity there is always a grain of truth. I care too much for your work to pass it off with a complimentary phrase; and about your work I can speak to you without fear of being misunderstood—but to you alone. These words are for no other ears. I beg of you *not* to show this letter to *any one*—but to your wife of course if she wishes to see it. No third person would understand how much affection, how much regard and respect for every line you write there is in this burst of criticism. I don't choose to be misinterpreted as I would be sure to be. The play is admirably done. I believe this, and that's all I need say to men who are strangers to your effort and to my anxiety. And you must forgive the stupidity, the inevitable stupidity that no one can steer clear of in this world. If I have not understood you I would have at least showed you how in this instance you may be misunderstood. And that knowledge may be useful too in a universe ruled mainly by fools.

With our dear love

Ever yours

CONRAD

Pent Farm Stanford Near Hythe Kent 20 *Nov.* 1906

My dear Edward.

You attach too much importance to my remarks! At the same time you do seem to be a little unreasonable—in discounting my judgement on the ground that it is delivered with the knowledge of the end! How else could I judge? You advance as a sort of objection that I reason from my knowledge of the end. I reason of course from my knowledge of *the whole.* In what way the *ignorance of the audience* is more likely to be right I don't know. I can assure you that the audience will judge—or sum up its feeling about the play—from its knowledge of *the whole.* It cannot be otherwise. To reproach me with my clairvoyance is not exactly just my dear Edward. But if it is a sin then it isn't a very great one. Moreover, referring to the same part of your letter please note that I never said the audience would be bored. I said the audience wouldn't stand it, quite another thing. And even in that I shouldn't wonder if I were totally wrong.

We must meet soon. I am just now horribly seedy and depressed. I am meditating a flight to the South if it can be arranged. I must run over to town on Tuesday next, if I can, just to see you for an hour or so.

There would be much more to say about the play but frankly just now I am not up to it.

Love from us all Ever yours

CONRAD

Someries Luton 1 *Oc.* 1907.

Dearest Edward.

I only heard from Jack yesterday of your review[1] in the Nation. I sent to the Railway Station today for the No.

It makes a fine reading for an author and no mistake. I am no end proud to see you've spotted my poor old woman. You've got a fiendishly penetrating eye for one's most secret intentions. She *is* the heroine. And you are appallingly quick in jumping upon a fellow. Yes O! yes my dear Edward—that's what's the matter with the estimable Verloc and his wife: "the hidden weakness in the springs of impulse". I was so convinced that something was wrong there that to read your definition has been an immense relief—great enough to be akin to joy. The defect is so profoundly temperamental that to this moment I can't tell *how* I went wrong. Of going wrong I was aware even at the time of writing—all the time. You may imagine what a horrible grind it was to keep on going with this suspicion at the back of the head.

You must preach to me a little when we meet—and even pray over me if you only will. Unless you think I am past praying for.

Sitting here alone with the glowing lamp in this silent, as yet strange house, I feel a great affection for you—and a great confidence in your judgement.

[1] Of *The Secret Agent.*

Twelve years now—just a round dozen my dear—since I hear your voice in my ear as I put aside each written page. Yes. A great affection and an absolute confidence.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

When are you coming to see me in my new surroundings? Let it be soon. Any day. Any week. It'd really be no trouble to come over here and sleep one night before going to the Cearne at the end of your London spell. Only let me know the day because I want to meet you at the station. Remember me very affectionately to your wife. Jessie sends her dear love.

Friday [*October*. 1907.]

Dearest Edward.

Thanks for your letter. I've been expecting the appearance of the play[1] and the attack on the censor with impatience.

Of course I'll write something since you think it may do good in the endeavour to get us rid of a bitter absurdity. Only I don't think my word will have any weight at all. I've been so cried up of late as a sort of freak, an amazing bloody foreigner writing in English (every blessed review of *S. A.*[2] had it so — and even yours) that anything I say will be discounted on that ground by the public—that is if the public, that

[1] *The Breaking Point.* [2] *The Secret Agent.*

mysterious beast, takes any notice whatever—which I doubt. You understand that having the novel of Mr B. Fry and his mamma for the fireside and Mr Hall Caine's "Christian" for their evening out they are not insensate enough to bother their heads about an absolutely incomprehensible controversy. They won't. Most of them have never heard of the Censor of plays and when they hear of his existence they will become at once instinctively his warm partisans. He is an institution, a respectable institution; he is an obvious and orderly fact; he satisfies the common mind and soothes the common cowardice. Andrew Lang will tell them perhaps that he is a historical survival and that'll capture their imaginations. To have a court official standing by to warn off criminal attempts on the delicacy of their morality will appear to them flattering —and natural too. For morality must be protected. That is self evident. Such protection is worthy in every sense and mostly in this that its existence in the corporeal shape of the Censor expresses the great fact of national self righteousness. Which fact is great and praiseworthy and very English.

On the other hand the public will learn of your existence. They will hear your name, and Chesterton's, and Galsworthy's and Archer's and, say, mine too and 40 other names. They will perceive dimly that we are not stockbrokers, not clerks, not manufacturers or bankers, or lawyers, or doctors or bishops or cricketers or labour members, or scavengers, or company directors. We will in short appear to be unauthorised per-

sons. Some Andrew Lang or other will tell them, or rather insinuate to them, that we are vulgar rogues and vagabonds. They'll accept this as a luminous statement for various self evident reasons one of them being that it'll save them trouble. A controversy is troublesome to the public mind. A controversy on the liberty of art is doubly troublesome because to that mind it is incomprehensible. When we say: Art, that public mind thinks (if it thinks at all) of water colour landscape as practised by their aunts, sisters, sweethearts. Thus our words are bound to sound to them fearfully unintelligible or abominably perverse.

Of course Lord A. and the Licenser of plays take themselves seriously. They think themselves guardians of public morality. In this belief they have with them the public opinion in so far as it is not public indifference. The day this support is withdrawn from them they will become ashamed of their functions and the censorship of plays will disappear.

I will take the line of the Policeman if you like: but frankly I don't think it is a good line. It is of course workable but I'll confess to you that it does not run in the way of my convictions. You say: *The Censor should be a policeman etc.* But my conviction is that the Censor should *not be at all.* You say: *change* the policeman. But who is to judge of his discrimination? How is he to be found out? Who is to dismiss him? Who is to be trusted with the power to nominate him? Where are you going to find the tact, the wisdom, the breadth of mind, the artistic sense, the philosophical impar-

tiality of thought, the wide intellectual sympathy, the humanistic and the brazen self-confidence necessary for such a post, for you can't draw a hard and fast line for him. He can't be a policeman he must be a magistrate, a high functionary—the supreme judge of form in art, the arbiter of moral intention. No. That function is impossible. The pretence to exercise it is shameful as all disguised tyranny is shameful. That's how I feel about it. The institution should be attacked on moral grounds as a cowardly expedient.

Yours ever

CONRAD

Note: if you wish it typed send to
Pinker with enclosed note.
Talbot House Arundel Street

Tuesday 4 *pm.* [*October.* 1907.]

Dear Chief,

(For you are the Cabecilla of the brave Guerillos)—here's my escopette ready to go off.[1] I've loaded it with a handful of pretty nasty slugs. Do you see to it that it is fired off properly by some steady hand. And look here: no censorship! It's *that* or nothing. I could not make it shorter. I am long because my thought is always multiple—but it is to the point anyhow. And I haven't spoken from a literary point of view. *You* can do that admirably. But as I love you

[1] The article "The Censor of Plays" which appeared in *The Daily Mail.*

I'll allow you to shorten what's necessary.[1] Indeed the thing wants looking through carefully in proof. Only don't take the gems out. No gem must be taken out. I am proud of my powers of stately invective combined with the art of putting the finger to the nose. It's a fascinating mixture. Don't you go Censoring it too much —Your sagacious letter (one would think a piece of Macaulay) was not much to the point. You remember always that I am a Slav (it's your idèe fixe) but you seem to forget that I am a Pole. You forget that we have been used to go to battle without illusions.

[1] Conrad was addressing a *Daily Mail* audience, and it was necessary to shorten the paper a little and cut out two or three of the more extreme passages. It may be of interest here to give, from the original MS., these restored passages.

After "The Censor of plays! His name was not in the mouths of all men. Far from it" read:—

"His abode was no more distinguished for the veneration of mankind than the abode of the common hangman who at any rate does not kill *proprio motu* and does not suppress people in the dark."

After "as an irresponsible Roman Caesar could kill a senator" read:—

"He can go out in the morning this grotesque magistrate of a free commonwealth, catch a donkey on Hampstead Heath lead him into his study and sit him down in his curule chair. Has not Caligula made his horse a consul? He can do that and there is no one to say him nay. Perhaps indeed no one could detect the difference."

After "he would not dare to be what he is" read:—

"He must not even know that his grotesque existence is a direct insult to forty-five million more or less of souls certainly neither more nor less pure than his own, most of them more intelligent—all of them more worthy. I say deliberately all of them because of course the Censor of Plays is unique."

I have always regarded the paper "The Censor of Plays" as a masterpiece of rhetoric, and its spirit of ironical raillery plays round its unhappy subject in a manner most fascinating to watch.

It's you Britishers that "go in to win" only. We have been "going in" these last hundred years repeatedly, to be knocked on the head only—as was visible to any calm intellect. But you have been learning your history from Russians no doubt. Never mind. I won't say any more or you'll call it a mutiny and shoot me with some nasty preface perhaps. I am now going to inspect your manner of carving into small pieces the Censor of Plays. Book just arrived.

Ever yours

CONRAD

1908–1910

Someries Luton 31 *March* 1908

Dear Edward,

Thanks for your card of admission.[1] I have a morbid horror of the theatre. It grows. It has prevented me from seeing Jack's *Joy*.[2] I simply could not make up my mind to enter the place of abominations. It is not the horror of plays: it is the horror of acting.

Lately I haven't been ill. I have felt only very useless—and that's worse. I lose hold of my work too often not to grow demoralised. One reacts only up to a certain point. But it's no use talking of these things.

Jessie is very pleased to have been included in your invitation. The poor woman is getting more and more crippled. There is a good deal of pain too. For either of us it is not a smiling life.

Our love to you

Yours ever

J. Conrad

21 *August morning* 1908

Dearest Edward.

I write instantly to tell you of the great, great pleasure your note brought to me to begin the day with.

[1] *The Breaking Point* performance at the Haymarket Theatre, April 1908.

[2] *Joy*, by John Galsworthy. Produced at the Savoy Theatre, London, Sept. 24, 1907.

Your classification of the tales[1] is eminently satisfactory to me. I feel it is perfectly right. I am delighted to see you put the *Conde 3d*; and as to the *Informer* (for which I have been complimented and lauded from the U.S. and from France) I put it in to make up the vol. to requisite thickness—not from a desire to please all the world and his wife. I could not call the vol. the *Duel* because R. Marsh, novelist, had already protested against the title (when appearing serially in Pall Mall Mag.) as having been already used by him. Finally I concluded to arrange the tales chronologically and thus *Gaspar Ruiz* had to come first—dating from Jan. 1905. As at that time I was also writing the middle papers of the *Mirror of the Sea* you will admit that the child of your literary adoption has some versatility. Eh?

W. L. Courtney in a long article calls the *Duel* tedious and *Gaspar Ruiz* a masterpiece; and myself a heartless wretch with a pose of brutality like the rest of the moderns. Still, always according to W.L.C, there are two masterpieces and a half in the vol.—*G. Ruiz* being one of them, *An Anarch*: the other and the *Brute* the doubtful one.

Your acceptance of the *Duel* is balm to my soul. My first intention was to call that story *The Masters of Europe* but I rejected it as pretentious. Anyway I did conscientiously try to put in as much of Napoleonic feeling as the subject could hold. This has been missed

[1] *A Set of Six.*

by all the reviewers, every single one being made blind by the mere tale. I confess to you that I rested my trust on your judgement and would have been horribly cut up if you had condemned the story. It has been waved away by more than one editor I believe—and the P.M.M. (which favours me generally as witness *Typhoon*, *G. Ruiz*) accepted it with some hesitation I am told. A complimentary phrase to the address of the P.M.M would be a reward of moral courage and some insight.

Yes dear. I'll like and respect all you have to say. The *Times* review seemed to me insignificant. But there is a fellow in the *Dly News* who calls me—God only knows on what provocation—a man without country and language. It is like abusing a tongue-tied man, for what can one say. The statement is simple and brutal; and any answer would involve too many feelings of one's inner life, stir too much secret bitterness and complex loyalty to be even attempted with any hope of being understood. I thought that a man who has written the *Nigger*, *Typhoon*, *The End of the Tether*, *Youth*, was safe from that sort of thing. But apparently not. If I had made money by dealing in diamond shares like my neighbour here Sir Julius Wernher, of Hamburg, I would be a baronet of the U.K. and provided both with a language and a country. Still I suppose the man is simply an ass; and even the tribute he pays to your wife's unforgettable achievement fails to mollify me, for this once. For he goes on shoving me with incredible folly on to Turgeniev à

propos of *G. Ruiz*, comparing it with *Lear of the Steppes* do you understand? *The Lear*!!! that infernal magazine fake with the *Lear of the Steppes*!!!! It is enough to make one wonder whether the man understands the words he writes—whether he has sense and judgement enough to come in when it rains? Has ever the Shade of a great artist been more amazingly, more gratuitously insulted? Who's that fellow? . . . Couldn't someone speak to him quietly and suggest he should go behind a counter and weigh out margarine by the sixpennyworth? I can understand Anderson Graham to whom I am such an offensive fraud that he can't even see me scratch the side of my nose without exasperation at the indecency of the thing. That's a genuine temperamental expression, frank and honourable enough in its way tho' certainly a little funny. He jumps on me with both feet in the *Country Life* "book of the week".[1] But the *Dly News* article is beyond everything the gloomiest pessimism as to the good feeling and common decency of daily criticism could imagine.

Thanks once more for your dear little note and for the forthcoming review. Remember to your wife and David when you write. Love from us all

Yours ever

J. Conrad

P.S. No. The house was unsuitable. We are trying for something Ashford way, towards Aldington and Smeeth.

[1] See *A Personal Record*, 2nd par. of Chapt. vi.

28 *Aug.* '08

Dearest Edward.

I have the Nation and I must thank you for the article.[1] No doubt to put one's tongue into both cheeks at once is an immoral trick and I suspect that it is on that ground that you and W. L. Courtney (bow) meet in the condemnation of the *Informer*.

I don't defend him—it. But let me ask is my earnestness of no account? Is that a Slavonic trait? And I am earnest, terribly earnest. Carlyle bending over the history of Frederick called the Great was a mere trifle, a volatile butterfly, in comparison. For that good man had only to translate himself out of bad German into the English we know whereas I had to work like a coal-miner in his pit quarrying all my English sentences out of a black night.

For that reason, I suppose, I read in a study (still unpublished) of Conrad, that I gloat over scenes of cruelty and am obsessed by visions of spilt blood.

At any rate I think I have always written with dignity, with more dignity than the above-alluded-to butterfly ever could command. And that not certainly from lack of conviction which often takes that outward form. The fact is that I have approached things human in a spirit of piety foreign to those lovers of humanity who would like to make of life a sort of Cook's Personally Conducted Tour—from the cradle

[1] Review of *A Set of Six*.

to the grave. I have never debased that quasi-religious sentiment by tears and groans and sighs, I have neither grinned nor gnashed my teeth. In a word I have behaved myself decently—which except in the gross conventional sense is not so easy as it looks. Therefore there are who reproach me with the pose of brutality with the lack of all heart delicacy, sympathy—sentiment—idealism. There is even one abandoned creature who says I am a neo-platonist? What on earth is that?

However as long as *you* are there my memory will be safe. That's what I thought while reading your review. The quotation is most skilfully selected since it is effective *per se* not depending on the remote context and giving a good, almost too good, idea of the story.

We are going for a week or so to Aldington—rooms in a farmhouse not very far from the Hueffers. I shall probably take a long spell of heavy pulling at the novel[1] without a name. I have it all in my head and yet when it comes to writing I simply can't find the words, I have been like that before 10 years ago but now it is a more serious portent. I am just a bit scared —but don't mention it to anybody. I wish I could believe in an intelligent, benevolent Supreme Being to whom I could leave the task of paying my debts—such debts as the one I owe you for instance. And perhaps there is one. I don't know but it is clear that

[1] *Under Western Eyes.*

unless there be a God to repay you in some heavenly coin I shall die in your debt. Love from us all

Yours

J. Conrad

Someries Luton Sunday 12 *Dec.* '08

Dearest Edward,

I have been in hopes of seeing you at the M. B.[1] week after week. Then gout came and I find that even the next Tuesday must be given up; the foot is too swollen yet, tho' the entertainment has been over now for several days.

Pray let me know all there is to tell of David. We have been anxious ever since I learned your fears[2] and told Jessie of them. To ask you for news, since goodness only knows when I may see you, is the only object of this. Or almost the only object. I want also to know where he is now. The generous McClure has sent me 4 copies of the *Duel* in (small) book-form; and whether he has read the story or not I want to send him an inscribed copy on the strength of our old acquaintance.

Do you see the Editor as of yore? He seems very busy. The E. R.[3] looks noble and I hear from all sides that the first No. has gone off very well, remarkably so. Is that a fact? I would like to know, for I am anxious for Ford to make a success.

[1] The Mont Blanc restaurant.

[2] A false alarm about consumption. [3] The *English Review*.

Tarver (the "Flaubert" Tarver) who is now in Chile writes me that *Nostromo* has met with no end of appreciation on the seaboard where the scene is laid, and from people in the know. That's something, tho' I admit it doesn't amount to much.

Our love to you.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Do drop us a few lines.

16 *Dec* '08

Dearest Edward,

It is an *immense* relief. You don't know how that thing has been lying on us. You see we had the same experience with Borys only some 20 months ago.

Yes! You speak words of wisdom as to the E.R.[1] That is the way. I've said already something to the same effect; but I don't want to appear as if I wished to meddle; the more so that I can't pretend to any experience—tho' I may have some 'sense'—of affairs.

Since your letter the year-end doesn't seem so gloomy. I'll be sending the little vol. to David in a day or two as I want to write him a short note too.

Our dear love to you

Yours ever

J. Conrad

[1] The *English Review*.

[*To David Garnett*] 22 *Dec* 1908 *Someries Luton.*

My dear David,

Your father (who is an older friend of mine than yourself but only by some ten months or so) tells me you have read already this story. But still I send you the little volume as I want you to have something of mine, from myself, in memory of the days when we both were considerably younger—and less wise.

As the years go on you will remember those days better. For me they have a very special value on which I will not enlarge at present. You were a child then, and I but an infant—a literary infant—whose first steps were—like your own—watched over by your mother and father, though I don't mean to say with the same anxious interest. That's a bond between us, surely. I think that in those days under the roof of the Cearne we were very good friends—you and I.

It pleases me to think that on some far distant day, when you are as grizzled as I am now, you may in a pause of serious occupations, take down this little book from the shelf and glancing through it give a kind smile to my memory.

May the coming years bring you success in everything you undertake.

Your sincere friend

J Conrad

Aldington Hythe Kent 17*th April* 1909

Dearest Edward,

Thanks for the play[1] which reached me today and, as you may imagine, was read at once.

It is magnificently suggestive—to begin with—in a general way; in its psychology, I mean. Though I detest the stage I have a theatrical imagination—that's why perhaps I detest the stage—that is the actors who mostly poor souls, have no imagination. And my theatrical imagination has been profoundly satisfied by the certainty of the effects—all the effects—of the atmosphere and of the passions; that sort of contentment the middle plays of Ibsen give one. Never a moment of doubt in acting the thing to oneself as the eye follows the lines—a great testimony to the poetical truth and force of the work.

At the end one wishes there were more of it. This my dear Edward I mean as criticism; but you will remember that this criticism may proceed from some defect of my theatrical imagination; which I know I have, without being certain of its soundness or of its completeness, however. It is as if the subject had been treated too summarily. A sort of artistic uneasiness remains, very faint indeed and yet too persistent (I've been living exclusively with the play for the last 8 hours) not to be mentioned from me to you. I have

[1] *The Feud.* A play in three acts, by Edward Garnett. A. H. Bullen, 1909.

been asking myself: What is it? One seems to feel that you held your hand—yet on the re-reading that impression vanishes. There is an exactness, a clearness which leave nothing to lay hold of. No! decidedly the defect is in me. The more one examines the mechanism and the expression the more the conviction grows upon one that a family drama of the "gentry" in 13th Century Iceland could not have been rendered with more precision or sentiment and truthfulness of detail.

I congratulate you upon your luck in the matter of your interpreters. Did you "produce" yourself? I'll try to drop in at the Mont Blanc on some not too distant Tuesday for a real talk with you. Meantime don't think me an insensible fool, an irresponsive ass. I have responded indeed and feel very happy in the play—but every one has a devil in him, you know. Mine makes me so ambitious for those that have my affection that in the end my affection won't be worth having. But enough of that. It was very dear and charitable of you to think of sending me a copy. Our best love to you all. Jessie begs to be specially remembered to your wife for whom you know she always had an instinctive admiration

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Aldington Hythe Kent 19 *July* '09

Dearest Edward.

It is a fact I had a most damnable go of gout which absolutely prevented me from getting the 8th inst. of *Rems.*[1] ready in time. But it was neither more nor less serious than other attacks of the kind for the last 15 years. I suppose one of them will finally do for me. All the same I was vexed by that silly editorial note. There was no earthly reason for any note and if he had to do it, *indisposition* was a quite strong enough word for all practical, editorial purposes.

Thanks my dear Edward for your inquiry. How is it with you? I haven't either the time or the pluck to travel up to town. Rumour of the E. R. having been sold has reached me lately.

Did you review anywhere Masefield's latest book? If so I should like to see what *you* had to say of it.

Jack's in London and has sent me his new play *The Eldest Son.* First rate—quite. However you either have seen it or shall see it soon and a good lot might be said about it.

Our dear love to you. Remember us affectionately to your wife. I hear David is preparing his exam—the best of luck to him!

Ever yours

J. Conrad

[1] "Some Reminiscences," *English Review*, 1909.

Capel House Orlestone Nr Ashford 22 Nov 1910

Dearest Edward.

Its ever so good of you to have sent me the Hogarth little book.[1] I knew practically nothing of the man. And I was glad to learn.

I have meditated over some of these small pages where indeed one finds more than what meets the eye. For your critical thought once started leads one to a return upon oneself.

And after all Hogarth was a story teller, a critic of life; and thus every word of your appreciation seemed to have a double value; illuminative as to the subject searching as to the reader—this reader.

In addition you are so interesting all the time, its surprising how much characteristic suggestion you have packed into that small compass. But all your criticism that I ever heard or read is infinitely suggestive. I believe, my dear Edward, that if you started criticising the leg of a table you would end by getting home to our consciences — I mean of us all who have, at least tried to do something with an honest purpose.

Marwood gave me news of you some time ago and only last Sunday P. Gibbon reported having sighted you in London looking well. But all the same the days slip away. A sort of unholy spell keeps me chained to

[1] *Hogarth*, by Edward Garnett (The Popular Library of Art). Duckworth, 1920.

the desk. And for what? Either for nothing or for rather less than nothing.

But its a fact that the London Mag. has accepted a story[1] (longish) of mine which I have written since my illness. You can't say that I haven't 'arrived'.

A good grip of your friendly hand if only on paper

Ever yours

J. Conrad

[1] *A Smile of Fortune.*

1911

Capel House. Orlestone. Nr Ashford. 12 *Jan.* '11.

Dear old boy,

I was glad to hear from you. Don't put off your promised visit too long. Yes, it is a far cry from 1894 when this literary child was born to you. For you know you can't get out of it however you may regret it. You are responsible for my existence.

Directly I get 3 instalments or so of the novel together[1] I'll send them to you. My copy of proofs is uncorrected as yet.

Look here. The straight truth of it is that I am now writing a silly story (being near to the end of it)[2] and as soon as I am done with the truck and have got over the disgust my writing leaves behind, I shall drop you a postcard asking for the play. I don't ask for it now because I know myself. I would look at it at once and I am not fit to look at anything at present. I am in that state that I would hit Venus of Milo on the nose if anybody showed her to me. I am not trying to be funny I assure you: this state of mind is as near as damn it to cutting one's throat.

And so you've kept my letters! Have you! Ah my dear you'll never meet the man who wrote them again. I feel as if I had somehow smashed myself. But do come over and look at the pieces. The only thing you'll find uninjured will be my affection for you.

[1] *Under Western Eyes.* [2] *Freya of the Seven Isles.*

Jessie sends her love to you all. Pray remember me to your wife and David as tenderly as they will let you.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Capel House, Orlestone, Nr. Ashford. [*February* 17. 1911].

Dearest Edward,

A thousand apologies for delay. A fool girl mislaid the envelope and I was going to write you in despair when it turned up.

Is what I have written sufficient?[1] If you had given me the slightest lead I would have done better.

In haste.

Ever yours,

J. Conrad

2 *March* 1911

Dearest Edward,

I got that infernal story[2] out of the house this morning at last! Do send me your Joan and believe me if I say that I am asking for her at the earliest possible moment when I feel I can trust myself to read anything.

[1] (A Petition for a Civil List Pension for Mr. W. H. Davies, the poet.)

I associate myself with all my heart with the opinion that Mr. W. H. Davies' poetical gift is of the rarest and its expression enriching our literature most deserving of recognition.

Joseph Conrad.

[2] *Freya of the Seven Isles.*

There's nothing much to tell you. And if there were it would be the old story. So to avoid monotony I take refuge in silence.

I am expecting you here (*we* are) all the time—you know!

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Monday [*March.* 1911.]

Dearest Edward,

Phew! This *is* fine.[1] Just one word as the curtain falls for the last time Fine!

How sternly imagined, how tenderly felt, how magnificently conducted! I am glad—I'll with your leave keep the MS. for 3 days before I read it again.

I wanted to give the very freshest, first impression just now, but won't say more at present.

Fine!

Yours

J. Conrad

[*March* 7. 1911.]

Dearest Edward,

Yes. The impression of the achievement remains, perhaps the stronger from the deep conviction of how incapable I would have been even to attempt that kind of work. Creative? Well, yes. Your doubt

[1] *The Trial of Jeanne d'Arc.* An Historical Play in Five Acts. By Edward Garnett. Sidgwick and Jackson, 1912.

on that point I can understand but for myself I have no doubt—even after a long reflection. It is creative in the sense in which a mystery play is creative. The feeling that there is something in all this more subtle, stronger and more poignant than the actual sensations and ideas expressed in the words and in the action abides with one all the time. No small triumph for you. For you must understand that I know nothing of Joan of Arc; that is no more than I learned of her as a boy. And as a matter of fact 99% of any audience assembled to see the play will know no more. Therefore you may look upon me as the stodgiest "bourgeois" in the stalls. The only difference is that the "bourgeois" likes the stage and I don't. But one cannot dislike an art so much without understanding something of it if only a prejudiced sort of way. And in this connection what strikes me is that the climax of the action (in fact the only action of the play strictly speaking) that recantation with its cause and effect is perhaps not sufficiently emphasised for the theatre. A supreme moment should be made to stand out supremely especially when as in this case it throws such a searching light on the spiritual situation which is the real subject of the play. It is the revelation of her incredible sufferings, the measure of her nature and the shape of her humanity. And yet this crisis is contained in one short scene.

It is possible that I am wrong, over-anxious. But believing as I do that the control of the public's (audience, readers) attention is in a sense the beginning

and end of artistic method I had to confess my uneasiness. You must forgive me. It is really because I do care for your work at least as much as I do for my own. I have told myself insistently that after all the subject is the *Trial* of Joan. But even then . . . And don't forget my dear boy that from the nature of things such a subject cannot be developed. It can only be unrolled—and it is unrolled with undoubted mastery with a relentless hand. A great consecutive picture—and yet it seems to me that in that one particular part there is something as it were blurred.

I won't say any more just now—except to express my admiration at the art with which you have differentiated all the churchmen. That's a feat! And it proves sufficiently the *creative* quality of your imagination. Very fine—very fine indeed. You must come over soon so that we may have a talk. I am very lame again just now or I would try to get to you. Give our love to your wife and son.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

P.S. What do you think of Jack's last?

[*March.* 1911]

Dearest Edward,

I send you Norman Douglas' book.[1] Can you do something to give it a start? I understand that

[1] *Syren Land*, by Norman Douglas. Dent, 1911.

you liked what you had seen of his in the *E. R.* It is a serious matter for the poor fellow to get decent reviews and if you could give a lead? His opinions would make him acceptable for extra notice in *Nation* or any other liberal paper. I am so out of everything that I must appeal to you in this matter. And the man is worthy—I think

Yours ever

J. C.

Sunday [*March.* 12 1911.]

Dearest Edward,

You wont mind this pencil scrawl—feels less formal.

Thanks infinitely for taking interest in Douglas. Whatever happens I am grateful to you for honouring so handsomely this draft on your friendship. Sorry to learn that you have bad nights. They are the devil.

I ask myself whether I have conveyed to you sufficiently my appreciation of the *Jeanne d'Arc.* When a thing hits me straight I can only just exclaim without phrases. It's easier to make phrases about things that hit and glance off, and as to things that miss me of which I only feel the wind so to speak, I could write politely by the yard of them. I also feel a kind of compunction for putting forward my view of the recantation episode. But I wanted to give you *all* my impression—not in a critical spirit at all but as a matter of sincerity.

I am not at all sure that my feeling there was right. I build no great hopes on *H. T.* I met him once and was talked to by him in honeyed tones. He struck me as an *arriviste* pure and simple. But being a bitter and prejudiced person I may be wrong. In my character of a b. and p. person I mistrust likewise the public. Will they answer to the spiritual appeal by the play?

You see my dear fellow the *etat d'âme* capable of being moved by such a subject is not a common one. I don't mean to say that a crowd in the auditorium is incapable of it, only that such a mood is a rare one everywhere. The pretty-pretty of Maeterlinck is much more their mark—I mean the Pink Goose, or whatever kind of bird is being preserved at the Haymarket.

That fact I think must be faced, but its very probable that I make too much of it. The devil is never as black as he is painted. I don't want you to think me presumptuous or mad. You know that it was from the discussion of the *Tentation de St Antoine* that the idea of *Mme Bovary* sprang up in Flaubert's mind. A complete turn about. Why should you also not execute a change of front and take up a subject where your irony could find its opportunity, your wit an aim for its shafts? Why not write a play about the literary world which as far as I know has never yet been lighted by the masked glare of the footlights? Why not read up Scribe and Sardou (the two good mechanics) a little, and give us a play about *Le Monde où on Ecrit*—the world where they write! It would be fair game. And you seem to me the hunter pointed

out by destiny. You have heard so many confidences, observed so many illusions, weaknesses and struggles by that particular world. You who have a sense of the comic which would be governed by complete comprehension and sympathy.

Of course I don't mean anything like poor Gissing's Grub Street—but really I need not have said that.

The fable does not matter much. I don't think I would base it on the marital relations of the "world where they write" — The efforts to found say an Academy of letters would do as the stuff on which you could embroider some gorgeous grotesque and beautiful designs. For indeed it need not be all satire. You could speak the truth not only in jest but also in earnest. You could have a cut at the frauds but you could also strike a blow for the good cause. Of course poetical or rather imaginative realism should be the note. And who better fitted than you?

I will say no more. Think of it dear Edward. There are moments when I succeed in being "wholly serious" —and this is one of them.

Hint to me something of your opinion of Jack's novel.[1] I wrote to him about it yesterday. . . .

Love from us both.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

[1] *The Patrician*, by John Galsworthy. Heinemann, 1911.

Capel House Orlestone, Nr. Ashford, Kent. 18 *July* 1911

My dear Edward,

It was good to see your handwriting again. When! oh when! shall we set eyes on each other? We are not growing younger.

Glad you have got the Century.[1] Gibbon told me some time ago that there was something of the sort in the wind. That talented buccaneer has come down to Dymchurch for six weeks and I expect to see him pretty frequently.

No my dear boy. I haven't a single thing to send you. Moreover I don't think the Century shop wants me at all. If I am not mistaken they have refused in March last a very tolerable long-short story of mine. But I may be mistaken. It might have been Scribner's. I am very hazy as to what happens to my work after I've sent it out of the house with a curse. I am now pelting along with a novel[2] (God save the mark!) for the New York Herald. Its being made to measure no less than 90.000 words—and I won't let you know what I think of it. I only mention it at all so that you should know that I am not likely to do any short stories, either decent or indecent, for some months to come

How are you? Gibbon gave me a tolerably good report of you some time ago. I am immensely excited

[1] E. G. advised the *Century* for a year as to English authors' contributions.

[2] *Chance.*

about your wife's trans: of Dostoiewski. Give her my most respectful regards—and a greeting to David from one of his oldest friends.

Yours ever

J. Conrad.

July 29 11

Dearest Edward,

Pinker writes he has sent you *Freya* to look at. So it can't be the Century which has refused same in April last. It must have been Scribners—on the ground that: "its *overpowering* gloom makes it impossible for serialisation." All I can say is that I hope you won't be overpowered by the "gloom" to the point of swallowing a dose of prussic acid after reading the copy. Let me entreat you to bear up—to re-act—to be a man! And do write to me—so that I know you are still alive after the terrific experience which, I understand, has nearly killed the Scribner's man.

Seriously my dear fellow, I've tried to do a magazine-ish thing with some decency. Not a very high purpose; yet it seems I've failed even in that! All this is very comical—if not exactly amusing.

I wanted P. to send the story to B'wood. After all the "Maga." public was yet the one to catch on best to my stuff. I suppose I am myself a "horrible bourgeois" at bottom. But all the same it only shows your almost devilish (or diabolic)? cleverness; for it is you —and no other—who turned *Karain* (you remember?)

on to Maga.—so many years ago—with inspired judgement.

If only for the sake of old days don't bring your heaviest guns against the thing. It's but tissue-paper after all.

Love from us all.

Yours ever

J. Conrad.

August 4 1911

My dear Edward,

I have expressed to Pinker my view of his sending to you a story[1] rejected already by the Century. It was not fair either to you or me. As to faking a "sunny" ending to my story I would see all the American Magazines and all the American Editors damned in heaps before lifting my pen for that task. I have never been particularly anxious to rub shoulders with the piffle they print with touching consistency from year's end to year's end.

The story itself, I suppose, is not "done" since it has failed to convince you. It is the story of the *Costa-Rica* which was not more than five years old when I was in Singapore. The man's name was Sutton. He died in just that way—but I don't think he died of Slav temperament. He was just about to go home to marry a girl (of whom he used to talk to everybody and anybody) and bring her out there when his ship was run

[1] *Freya of the Seven Isles.*

on a reef by the commander of a Dutch gun-boat whom he had managed to offend in some way. He haunted the beach in Macassar for months and lies buried in the fort there.

Only 18 months ago Charles Marris master and owner of the *Araby Maid* island-trader, came to see me in Aldington. He was in England to see his people who farm in Somersetshire. He said to me: "We are all reading your books out there." We had a long talk about men and things of the Archipelago. He said: "You ought to write the story of the *Costa Rica*. There's a good many of us left yet who remember Sutton." And I said I would, before long.

That's how *Freya* came to be written. But of course facts are nothing unless they are made credible —and it is there that I have failed.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Capel House, Orlestone, Nr Ashford 20 *Oct* 1911

My dear Edward,

I don't understand your picturesque allusions to packing spinach into the saucepan and the hell broth that's supposed to be the result of that culinary operation. There's just about as much or as little hatred in this book [1] as in the *Outcast of the Islands* for instance. Subjects lay about for anybody

[1] *Under Western Eyes.*

to pick up. I have picked up this one. And that's all there is to it. I don't expect you will believe me. You are so russianised, my dear, that you don't know the truth when you see it—unless it smells of cabbage-soup when it at once secures your profoundest respect. I suppose one must make allowances for your position of Russian Embassador to the Republic of Letters. Official pronouncements ought to be taken with a grain of salt and that is how I shall take your article in the Nation which I hope to see tomorrow evening when the carrier comes back from Ashford. But it is hard after lavishing a "wealth of tenderness" on Tekla and Sophia, to be charged with the rather low trick of putting one's hate into a novel. If you seriously think that I have done that then my dear fellow let me tell you that you don't know what the accent of hate is. Is it possible that you haven't seen that in this book I am concerned with nothing but ideas, to the exclusion of everything else, with no arrière pensée of any kind. Or are you like the Italians (and most women) incapable of conceiving that anybody ever should speak with perfect detachment, without some subtle hidden purpose, for the sake of what is said, with no desire of gratifying some small personal spite—or vanity.

As to discussing Russia it's the most chimeric of enterprises since it is there for anyone to look at. "La Russie c'est le néant" Prince Bismarck said in 1864—and forthwith proceeded to prove it by 20 years of the most contemptuous policy towards that "Great Power". C'est le néant. Anybody with eyes can see it.

And anyhow if hatred there were it would be too big a thing to be put into a 6/- novel. This too might have occurred to you, if you had condescended to look beyond the literary horizon where all things sacred and profane are turned into copy.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Capel House, Orlestone, Nr. Ashford. 20 *Oct.* 1911.

[To Miss O. R. Garnett.]

Dear Miss Garnett,

You are a good critic. That girl does not move. No excuse can be offered for such a defect but there is an explanation. I wanted a pivot for the action to turn on. And I had to be very careful because if I had allowed myself to make more of her she would have killed the artistic purpose of the book: the development of a single mood. It isn't that I was afraid or ignorant of her possibilities. Indeed they were very tempting. But it had to be a performance on one string. It had to be. You may think such self-imposed limitation a very stupid thing. But something of the kind must be done or else novel-writing becomes a mere debauch of the imagination. No doubt if I had taken another line the book would have been richer. But what I aimed at this time was an effect of virtuosity before anything else. Still I need not have made

Miss Haldin a mere peg as I am sorry to admit she is. Result of over caution.

Your kind appreciation of the book gives me great pleasure and I am glad you think it is true—as [?far as it] goes. I am quite aware it does not go very far. But the fact is that I know extremely little of Russians. Practically nothing. In Poland we have nothing to do with them. One knows they are there. And that's disagreeable enough. In exile the contact is even slighter if possible if more unavoidable. I crossed the Russian frontier at the age of ten.[1] Not having been to school then I never knew Russian. I could not tell a Little Russian from a Great Russian to save my life. In the book as you must have seen I am exclusively concerned with ideas.

Yes. I had a letter and some books from Mr. Lutoslavsky. I ought to have written to him before—tho' really and truly I don't know what he wants with me. I don't understand him in the least. His illumination seems to me a very naïve and uninteresting thing. Does he imagine I am likely to become his disciple? He worries and bores me. But I won't tell him that when I write (as I must in common decency) because I believe he is a good man—though confoundedly inquisitive.

We had a letter from Elsie the other day. She seems quite well now. We don't see much of her because of the distance. But we had Xna[2] staying with us for a few days during the holidays.

[1] Exactly on the 5th of January 1868.

[2] Christina Hueffer.

Thanks once more for your friendly and very interesting letter. I assure you I am very sensible to all the kind things you say of my work. Believe me with great regard,

Yours faithfully

J. Conrad

Wednesday [*Dec.* 1911]

Dearest Edward,

I hadn't turned over the third page[1] when I let out a whistle of respectful admiration. Frankly I never suspected in Mr Byrne that power of "haut comique". For it is that—the comic just trembling on the verge of poignancy. And the wit: not the wit of repartee (which always gets on my nerves in a play) but the whole conception of the play being so witty! I have had there a most delightful surprise going on from page to page from act to act—a true effect of art—for never, not for a single moment, has my conviction wavered. After the first half of the first act I went on with a sense of secure anticipation without a check.

I admire the exposition of the first act and the inventiveness of the last. The second in its way is perfect. I don't know if the third act does not suffer from a certain effect of summariness. Mind—I don't mean to say that there is anything in it that isn't triumph-

[1] *Lords and Masters*, by James Byrne. [Edward Garnett.] Sidgwick and Jackson, 1911.

antly right in the lightness of touch and truth of feeling. No. One can question nothing; but one wonders if one more turn of screw—or even half a turn—something more from Catherine—something in the nature of a cri- de coeur, a glimpse of humanity under her admirably rendered feminity would not give the supreme touch of poignancy to that creation of "grand comique". For, obviously, she *is* human.

But I may be wrong. Perhaps anything more would have been out of tone.

But anyhow to the very end the impression of the first-ratedness of the work persists, and survives a critical meditation.

Thanks my dear fellow for sending me the little book. I can hardly tell you how pleased I am with it: the deft touch, the perfect mastery of intention, the felicity of phrase (*not* picturesqueness) disclosing character (the amazingly true mother-in-law) I have taken it all in and cherish it greatly. Oh it is good! Well.

Our dear love and tenderest wishes to you three. Tell me something of David when you write next. I expect I shall come to town in January and shall invade you at Duckworths for a long talk.

Yours ever. With affectionate exultation in Mr. Byrne's work

J Conrad

28 *Dec.* '11

My dear Edward,

On re-reading and thinking it out I see that the 3d act is not summary. It is rapid only—for only think how much happens in it in comparison with the first two. I mean here the mere comings and goings. It is indeed an excellent act; cleverly invented and finely imagined. The animation of it is quite extraordinary (given the situation) and I envy you the power which could conceive and create all the successive "scenes" of (in the French sense).

But it is the exposition of the first and the development of the third act which strike me as masterly. If I don't go into special ecstacies over the mother it is simply because I can see how fine the others are; the husband, the truly marvellously rendered friend—how good that incidental figure is, how tactfully done!—and the flawless Milly. Don't be annoyed at my enthusiasm. It is perfectly sincere if artless—and perhaps a bit egotistic. I always thought you could do that sort of thing if you only tried. And to see my secret opinion so triumphantly vindicated is very delightful.

Meditating over the play in the light of your letter I feel that you want only (if you would condescend) to adopt some sort of fable, story, anecdote (the commonest the better) to serve as a vehicle for your wit and psychology, in order to get hold of success in the popular way. It would no doubt be a concession to

the depraved beast—but I question whether one does not owe such a concession to one's own gift. I venture to speak like this my dearest Edward because in all soberness I am very much impressed by the play. You won't take it ill, because I don't presume to offer advice; I am expressing to you my feeling which is the sort of thing for which one is not responsible. It seems to me I could back it up with arguments—but enough for this time. Also of Catherine one can better talk than write. Don't imagine I am not alive to her excellence. Rather! But of that some other time. Love from us all

Yours ever

J. Conrad

P.S.

Thanks for your invitation dear boy. I am very much interested by the little you tell me of David. By the bye: Marwood tells me he has asked you to run down here, but when I saw him yesterday he said he had no answer from you yet. Sacrifice a couple of days—give him one, and give one to us. Anyhow I shall certainly make a dash to town before long just to see you. But there is a novel in the way. The last 2000 words! Horrors!

Capel House Orlestone Nr Ashford 27 *Jan* 12

Dearest Edward,

Just a word to tell you your good long letter reached me this morning. You know I have always "looked up to you"—and shall always do so as long as this hand holds the pen, that pen which you have put into it—and no one and nothing else. I am infinitely grateful to you for this hour, stolen from your weariness to talk to me in that brotherly way about the little volume.

I am much relieved by your approval of these chance-born pages.[1] It is our Olympian F.M.H.[2] who fairly worried me into beginning them—you know.

For a long time I hesitated as to letting them go out in book form—and if it had not been that I wanted the sixty pounds, Nash has advanced me for them, to send B. to a bigger school, they should have remained unprinted yet. Still I *felt* that what was there formed a whole in itself. And since I see that you seem to think so I feel much comforted and cheered. I am within a few pages of the end of a novel[3] and daren't leave my table to run over and shake your friendly (and so often guiding) hand. But I shall be free soon. Yes my dear Edward, you have been the true knight-errant of oppressed letters in all these years we have known

[1] *Some Reminiscences.* [2] Ford Madox Hueffer.
[3] *Chance*, finished on the 26th of March.

each other. More power to your trusty sword-hand till it's too dark to fight any more. Mind I have booked that promise for March, and you shall be dunned mercilessly till you redeem it.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Capel House, Orlestone, Nr Ashford. 27 *May* '12

Dearest Edward,

I do hope you are not too disgusted with me for not thanking you for the *Karamazov*[1] before. It was very good of you to remember me; and of course I was extremely interested. But it's an impossible lump of valuable matter. It's terrifically bad and impressive and exasperating. Moreover, I don't know what D. stands for or reveals, but I do know that he is too Russian for me. It sounds to me like some fierce mouthings from prehistoric ages. I understand the Russians have just 'discovered' him. I wish them joy.

Of course your wife's translation is wonderful. One almost breaks one's heart merely thinking of it. What courage! What perseverance! What talent of—interpretation let us say. The word 'translation' does not apply to your wife's achievements. But indeed the man's art does not deserve this good fortune. Turgeniev (and perhaps Tolstoi) are the only two really

[1] *The Brothers Karamazov.* Translated from the Russian of Feodor Dostoevsky. By Constance Garnett. Heinemann, 1912.

worthy of her. Give her please my awestruck and admiring love. One can be nothing less but infinitely grateful to her whatever one may think of or feel about D. himself.

Tell me, when you have a moment to spare, what sort of reception had your Spanish play.[1] I reckon it is due for performance from what you told me. I haven't seen any papers for a week. I am trying to start a long short story and these beastly things put me off completely. I know that there is another strike and that's all. But that sort of thing is growing monotonous, and having no particular respect for either of the *three* parties I am not exciting myself over the game unduly.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

16 *Oct.* 12.

Dearest Edward,

Thanks for your letter. You know my dear boy I send you my books[2] because of my great affection for you to read when you have time and either to write of them or not as the spirit moves you and circumstances permit. I mean publicly. To me personally I know you will speak when the time comes. I have accustomed myself to look upon it as a privilege of which nothing conceivable to my mind can deprive

[1] *The Spanish Lovers.* Adapted from *La Celestina.* By Edward Garnett. Produced at the Little Theatre. June 1912.

[2] *'Twixt Land and Sea.*

me now. But please don't let that right of mine interfere with your work or even with your leisure, I can wait.

Would Curle come to see me? That criticism is something and no mistake. All that went before seems mere verbiage in comparison. I am exceedingly pleased. Give him my friendly greeting. Of course I have had his book—but unless civil nothings it is very difficult to write to an author whom one does not know. I am now unfit for the company of my kind, crabbed and snarly and stupid with this beastly gout attack which hangs on and on. But I shall ask him down here soon. Send me his address and just tell me whether he can leave London on week days—or is Sunday the only convenient time for him.

Our love to you all.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

5 Nov. '12

Dearest Edward,

Pardon this scrap of paper. I ought to have thanked you before for the Jeanne d'Arc book. My admiration for that piece of your work has always been complex—for the wonderful feeling it conveys and for the almost more wonderful manner in which it is done. As to the courage of tackling such a killing subject my admiration for it has no bounds. It requires a spiritual resolution and a firmness of mind! for, look you—in the way you took hold of it you could not expect any help from any tricks or subterfuges—

charlatanism in short of the kind even the sincerest artists use sometimes. No. There was no room left for that in your scheme. And the whole thing comes off—as sincere as a fine piece of music. (not Debussy's)

Thanks for your letter of the 3 tales[1]—very much of sorts. I daresay *Freya* is pretty rotten. On the other hand the *Secret Sharer*, between you and me, is *it*. Eh? No damned tricks with girls there. Eh? Every word fits and there's not a single uncertain note. Luck my boy. Pure luck. I knew you would spot the thing at sight. But I repeat: mere luck.

Why don't you come and pat me on the head, or hit me, or assert your indubitable paternity in some way. You'll find me most dutiful.

Do! Our love to you all.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

P. S.

I have been worried by a sort of languid gout attack which has lasted for 3 weeks or more now.

Capel House, Orlestone, Nr. Ashford. 28 *Jan* '14

My dear Edward,

I couldn't thank you sooner for your good letter because I was physically and mentally disabled by gout. Yesterday your review[2] in the Nation came through the press cutting Ass.

Thank you my dear fellow for all the appreciative

[1] '*Twixt Land and Sea.* Dent, 1912. [2] Of *Chance.*

things you say in public and in private. As to the exceptions you take I have always had the feeling that your criticism *must* be right. No doubt I could argue a point or two—and intend to do so when we have the happiness to see you here. For the rest all I can tell you is—that the pleasure of being so well understood (both as to method and intention) is the greater because it is so rare. In fact, there's no one who can see *inside* my work as you can. And if at the same time you can here and there see *through* it—well I suppose I must put up with being found out in my innocent malpractices. In fact my dear Edward my affection for you is so great that it was a sort of pleasure to see you put your unerring finger on the soft spot at the end of part I. Perfectly rotten of course; but it's difficult to keep honest with a knife at one's throat—you know. Well—more when we meet for I won't let you forget your promise to come here. Give my love to your wife and boy.

Yours ever

J. Conrad.

Capel House, Orlestone, Nr Ashford. Monday 23 *February* [1914]

My dearest Edward,

You have succeeded so well in effacing your personality in that little book[1] (and very interesting it is too) that but for an occasional turn of phrase I—even I!—can't see you there at all.

[1] *Tolstoy : A Study.* Constable and Co., 1914.

Dislike as definition of my attitude to Tols. is but a rough and approximate term. I judge him not—for this reason. That his anti-sensualism is suspect to me. In that matter (which is not worth the fuss which is made about it) the pros and the antis seem to me tarred with the same brush. Moreover the base from which he starts—Christianity—is distasteful to me. I am not blind to its services but the absurd oriental fable from which it starts irritates me. Great, improving, softening, compassionate it may be but it has lent itself with amazing facility to cruel distortion and is the only religion which, with its impossible standards, has brought an infinity of anguish to innumerable souls—on this earth.

However I don't suppose these views of mine can interest you and I only meant to send you a word of thanks. Why I should fly out like this on Xtianity which has given to mankind the beautiful Xmas pudding I don't know, unless that, like some good dogs, I get snappish as I grow old.

Bear in mind your promise! Our dear love to you and yours.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Dost. *Adolescent* going off same post to Cearne. I missed this evening's mail but I hope you will get this tomorrow (Tues) about 4 o'clock in town.

The Norfolk Hotel, Surrey Street, Strand, W.C. 5th March 1915.

Dearest old fellow,

. . . I went to Duckworth's office on Tuesday to unearth you, promising myself to see something of you after all these days. They simply said you weren't coming that day. We are going home tomorrow and shall wait impatiently for the word announcing your arrival.

I am more than prepared to hear (*and understand*) what you have to say of the *Planter*.[1] Even as I wrote I felt the discord, and was aware of your figure in the background. I shall listen with filial piety to all you have to say. Don't prolong the suspense unduly. Our dear love to your dear wife and yourself.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Courtney in the Daily Telegraph scolded me like a wet parrot.

Thursday. [*April* 13. 1916.]

My dear Edward,

I answered your postcard from Italy—ages ago but only heard lately that you were back in London. On our return from Poland in Nov. '14, I went straight to Duckworth. You weren't there but I understood that you had not broken your connection.

[1] *The Planter of Malata.*

I am very sorry to hear you are no longer reading for him.

Entre-nous I don't know much, I am sorry to say, of E. T.'s work;[1] so I am glad of the lead you've given me. If the letter is not exactly what it should be I'll write another.

I've been constantly ailing for more than a year. The gout now gets into the wrists—which is damnable —and also causes intestinal troubles frequently. I find work, properly speaking, impossible. Jessie too has not the health she had. I am rather worried about her. Borys with his section attached to a heavy battery, is somewhere near Armentières, well and happy.

Yours always

J. Conrad

23 *July* '16

Dearest Edward,

I answer at once to say that you have omitted to enclose the words your wife wishes me to transliterate into Polish. It'll be very simple to do as you say; but the request, till we know how it was brought about, does seem rather mysterious.

Since last February I have been on the mend physically. Mentally—the difficulty to tackle any kind of writing work is as bad as ever: that is almost paralysing. Jessie also is better. She sends her love.

[1] Edward Thomas.

John remains slender and grows longer every day.

Borys is with the guns, as he has been ever since he landed in France last Jan: and was moved at once to Armentières sector. Afterwards they were shifted up towards Ypres. He is now personally attached to the heavy artillery of the III Corps. 40th siege battery and I imagine on the Somme or thereabouts. We had a field post-card this morning dated the 21st.

I knew you were no longer reading for Duck'th. What's the matter with that shop? Other pub[ers] seem to be doing well enough. I was no end sorry to hear the connection was broken though I know well my dear Edward that it wasn't a bed of roses for you. But still . . .!

Have you seen a small book on me written by Walpole? I haven't, of course and I've also refrained from looking at the reviews of same. Nothing seems to matter much now.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

[*May* 2 1917]

Dearest Edward,

The trouble is that I too don't know Russian; I don't even know the alphabet. The truth of the matter is that it is *you* who have opened my eyes to the value and the quality of Turgeniev. As a boy I remember reading *Smoke* in a Polish translation (a feuilleton of some newspaper) and the *Gentlefolks* in French. I liked those things purely by instinct (a very

sound ground but no starting point for criticism) with which the consciousness of literary perfection had absolutely nothing to do. You opened my mind first to the appreciation of the art. For the rest Turgeniev for me is Constance Garnett and Constance Garnett *is* Turgeniev. She has done that marvellous thing of placing the man's work inside English literature and it is there that I see it—or rather that I *feel* it.

Upon the whole I don't see it. If I did see I could talk about it, perhaps to some purpose. As it is my dear I wouldn't know how to begin.

As far as I know you are the only man who had seen T. not only in his relation to mankind but in his relation to Russia. And he is great in both. But to be so great and at the same time so fine is fatal to an artist—as to any other man for that matter. It isn't Dostoiewski the grimacing haunted creature who is under a curse; it is Turgeniev. Every gift has been heaped on his cradle. Absolute sanity and the deepest sensibility, the clearest vision and the most exquisite responsiveness, penetrating insight and unfailing generosity of judgement, and unerring instinct for the significant, for the essential in human life and in the visible world, the clearest mind, the warmest heart, the largest sympathy—and all that in perfect measure! There's enough there to ruin any writer. For you know my dear Edward that if you and I were to catch Antinous and exhibit him in a booth of the world's fair, swearing that his life was as perfect as his form, we wouldn't get one per cent of the crowd struggling

next door to catch the sight of the double-headed Nightingale or of some weak-kneed giant grinning through a collar.

I am like you my dear fellow; broken up—and broken in two—disconnected. Impossible to start myself going, impossible to concentrate to any good purpose. It is the war—perhaps? Or the end of Conrad simply? I suppose one must end someday, somehow. Mere decency requires it.

But it is very frightful—or frightening. I think the last, rather.

No my dear fellow. I don't think the short book[1] "unworthy". It's dedicated to the boy. I got the notion into my head you were in Italy. Your copy is here and I am sending it to you now. Of course it's nothing of importance. I wonder what is? I mean of what I have done.

I didn't see the Nation's review. I knew it was not written by you being under the impression that you did cut loose from literature (for a time) and were not in England.

To be frank I don't want to appear as qualified to speak on things Russian. It wouldn't be true. I admire Turgeniev but in truth Russia was for him no more than the canvas for the painter. If his people had all lived in the moon he would have been just as great an artist. They are very much like Shakespeare's Italians. One doesn't think of it.

[1] *The Shadow Line.*

But my dear Edward if you say definitely I've to do it—well I'll try. I don't promise to bring it off tho'! As I've told you I don't seem to be able to get hold of anything. *The Shadow Line* was finished in Jan. '15. Since then I just wrote two short stories. Say 12000 words. I have destroyed a few pages. Very few.

This is the true state of affairs. And it's getting very serious for me too.

I've been gouty and almost continuously laid up since February. I've just got up after the last bout.

Perhaps if you would come down and talk a little you could wake me up. Who knows? For indeed my dear to refuse anything of the kind to you seems intolerable.

Give it a trial. Jessie backs this suggestion with all the force of her affection for you. I will say nothing of mine. You either believe in it—or you don't. I have sometimes wondered——

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Wednesday Capel House Orlestone Nr Ashford [*May.* 1917.]

Dearest Edward,

We are very glad to hear you are coming, to stay with us, on Monday. The station is Hamstreet and the train arrives about 1.15. You'll have to change on Ashford Junction.

I expect to have something roughed out for you to

see by that time. I think to write it as if to *you personally* would be the easiest for me—and perhaps the most effective.

I am looking up your marvellous prefaces to-day. They are great.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Jessie's love

Friday [*May.* 1917.]

Dear Edward,

Thanks for your letter. There is no note of irony in it and I don't believe you wanted to put it in—in this case.

I didn't want my scrawl[1] back. I really thought you told me to send it on. Why didn't you light the domestic fire with it? P. will have a clean copy made for me too from the corrected type.

Awfully good of you to send me the portrait of M. L.[2] I think she will be It if she only cares for the part. Am writing to Irving today.

Letter to W. de la M. goes this post. Seriously my dear fellow it was comforting and warming to have

[1] I may note here that Conrad's Preface to *Turgenev, A Study* ends in the original MS. differently from the printed version. It runs thus :—" Some weak-kneed giant with a face of meaningless pathos, maybe ; that hint of aimless, mysterious suffering exhibited for its own sake as it were." The printed version ends with a phrase taken from the letter above.

[2] Mona Limerick, the actress whom I suggested might play the part of Winnie Verloc.

you here, all to myself, and laugh, and ironise, and squabble with you as in the days when the wine was still red and women more than a mere memory of smouldering furies (of all sorts) and diabolic eccentricities. . . . The loftiness of your sentiments and the austerity of your demeanour intimidated me. Even now during your visit I wanted once to be impertinent to you and simply couldn't do it. The Prestige! Your undying prestige! It's true that I managed to get furious with you for about 7½ seconds, but that, really, was a sort of inverted tribute. If you think there are many men for whose words I care enough to get furious with them you are mistaken. There is in fact only one—yourself. For contempt at a certain temperature may resemble fury. But you get the genuine article. The rest of mankind may flatter itself . . .

Jessie and John send their love.

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

Capel House, Orlestone, Nr Ashford. 27 Oct. '17

My dearest Edward,

I asked Jessie to drop you a line on receipt of the book[1] which was delayed somehow.

I got back home last night, dead lame, as usual, after an excursion. While away I saw the *Outlook* article which in its prosy way seemed to me good.

[1] *Turgenev, A Study*, By Edward Garnett. Collins, 1917.

Your opening pages are excellent, excellent! I was much delighted with your masterly thrusts at all that thick-headed crowd. As to the rest of the book you know that I *do* know it well. I re-read your prefaces often. You have fused them together with great skill and judgement and I suppose you had to do that; but for my part I regret every word left out—no doubt wisely, but still . . .

Do remember us affectionately to your wife. I suppose D[avid] doesn't remember those two figures from the immemorial past when he was five or thereabouts and sailed in an (iron ?) tub with me. Those were good times! These Ghosts send a warm greeting to him

Ever yours

J. Conrad

PS. B. [Borys] was here for 10 days about a month ago. He's just got his second star after 18 months at the front. He was recommended for promotion after the Somme push but those things are slow in coming. He enquired affectionately after you—and so did Hope when he was here last July.

Jessie's love. She's laid up with the knee.

Sunday [*Dec.* 3 1917.].

Dearest Edward,

Will you come early and spend the first evening of 1918 with us (Tuesday)? No need to answer this unless you can't come.

My heart failed me at the last moment when on the point of sending you my MS.[1] But don't flatter yourself. It was the Post Office (in the holiday rush) that I was afraid to trust. If that copy had gone astray it would have been a disaster as there is no other yet.

It's here provisionally corrected waiting for you.

Do try to come.

All our loves.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

If we don't hear by Tuesday mid-day we shall expect you for supper according to precedent.

[1] The first chapters of *The Arrow of Gold.*

1918-1920

6 *Jan* 1918

Dearest Edward,

Will you come on Friday or any day before Fri. dropping me a line to that effect?

I've an ad^ce copy of the *Nostromo* re-issue for you here. Shall I keep it till you come?

I am still a prisoner, lame, not a little sick of it. I've been working however at the rate of four of my pages per day—but without pleasure and only feeling now and then in touch with my subject.

I forgot to give you the pages last time. I shall have another copy made and then I'll be able to trust the post. Now I am "afeared".

Jessie's love.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Have *you* been doing anything?

Thursday 31 *January* 1918

Dearest Edward,

It's perfectly ridiculous, but as you insisted on it, you are hereby assured that Mr. and Mrs. J. Conrad are expecting you tomorrow evening at the usual time.

Do come my dear fellow. The days are running out and I am anxious to learn of *all* the ways and means of

"offending your taste"[1] so as to make my last novel as perfect in perversity as possible.

Our love

Yours ever

J. C.

Capel House, Orlestone, Nr Ashford. March 27th 1918

Dearest Edward,

Our warmest thanks for your brotherly sympathy with our natural anxiety about the boy. He is right in the thick of things, for at the beginning of this attack he was only about 12 miles from St. Quentin. This morning we had a field p.c. dated the 24th.

Yes. Jack's testimonial, if he would give you one, would be trustfully accepted by the more or less intelligent mass. As to some Big Pot, you know my dear fellow that I have no more notion of them than of Big Tango Dancers of the day; so I can't suggest anyone who might serve. I would love to see the whole set of Nineteen,[2] but not to make any suggestions. For the pleasure. For the aesthetic appeal, and to see its whole effect.

[1] This refers to some remark of mine about a passage in the first chapters of *The Arrow of Gold*. I had strongly advised Conrad to go forward with the novel, and gave him my critical reasons. He declared then that he had determined to abide by my advice and would have abandoned the book had my verdict been unfavourable.

[2] Satires on the war by E. G. published subsequently in collected form, *Papa's War*. The *Herald* Office, 1919.

To throw a rope round the whole thing [the War] is rather a good idea, but even as to this I can't make a suggestion. I can't think consecutively and the few distressed thoughts that are knocking about in my head I am totally unable to put into words. Its a most distressing and depressing state to be in. One marches staggering along the very edge of despair hour after hour, day after day, feeling that one will never get anywhere.

Ever affectionately yours

J. Conrad

P.S.

Jessie's love. She will be writing to you presently.

Capel House, Orlestone, Nr Ashford, Kent. May 16th. 1918

Dearest Edward,

You are quite right in thinking that I know nothing of those people of whom you speak. I don't even know their names. The one or two I have come in contact with must have carried away the very worst impression of my irreverent attitude and my sceptical state of mind. Like the rest of us poor mortals they resent the slightest independence of opinion and dislike those who do not swallow them whole. As to any magnanimity of conduct that is a thing almost inconceivable to their minds and truly abhorrent to their prudence.

Since leaving town I haven't been able to get hold of the young man Roberts, whom I suppose you mean.

He didn't answer our letters inviting him here, addressed to the Automobile Club. He may be either ill or gone away or in some other manner out of reach; but we shall make it our business to discover his private address from Mrs Willard who has introduced him to us. She too may be out of town, and in any case she is not very quick in answering letters, but Jessie will write to her to-day.

I return to you the type and the proof which you have sent me. The *English Review* thing[1] is wonderfully done and, of course, from a certain point of view it is absolutely unfair, as you know well yourself. Truth has not only been heard, it has even been chewed over and over again, and its true flavour has sunk into the very soul of the people. It is a bitter flavour but bitterness is the very condition of human existence, and mankind generally is neither guilty nor innocent. It simply *is*. That is misfortune enough. Men die and suffer for their convictions and how those convictions are arrived at doesn't matter a bit. That's why, my dear fellow, satire seems to me a vain use of intelligence, and intelligence itself a thing of no great account except for us to torment ourselves with. For directly you begin to use it the questions of right and wrong arise and these are things of the air with no connection whatever with the fundamental realities of life. Whereas in the region of feeling there is nothing of the kind. Feelings *are*, and in submitting to them

[1] *Truth's Welcome Home.* A satire.

we can avoid neither death nor suffering which are our common lot, but we can bear them in peace. The Edward Grey in Paris article [1] is very cleverly done. It is mordant, it is witty. But the greater the evidence of your extraordinary gifts in that way I will confess to you, my dearest fellow, the sadder I feel, not in antagonism but in real sympathy with you; with the deepest feeling for the inner tragedy of your existence —because it is nothing less than that for you and for anybody who understands your temperament (inclined to remorseless analysis) and the exquisite sensitiveness of your mind. Send me the *All-Highest* [2] article as soon as you can. I shall not presume to advise any alterations because I am convinced that in such a matter nobody has any right to interfere with your mental and still less with your verbal inspiration which is simply admirable. And any way don't please be angry with me for writing as I do.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Jessie's love. Borys all well on the 11th. Pardon type. Bad wrist.

Capel House, Orlestone, Nr Ashford. 22 *Dec* '18

My dear Edward,

I was just going to drop you a line when your precious little note arrived.

I missed you immensely my dear old friend during

[1] *A Week in Paris.* A satire. [2] *The All-Highest.* A satire.

all these days. The resumption of our intercourse has been very precious to me. It was a great and comforting experience to have your ever trusted and uncompromising soul come forward again from the unforgotten past and look closely at my work [1] with the old wonderful insight, with unimpaired wisdom and in unalterable friendship.

I was sorely tempted to ask you to come down for a few days; but flu' was raging all over our country-side, the weather was atrocious, Jessie herself was struck heavily (with consequent bronchitis too) and one of our maids nearly died in the house. Capel was not a healthy place to ask a friend to; while from a moral point of view it was a detestable atmosphere thick with gloom which even your "powerful intellect" could not have resisted, I believe. How I survived I don't know. At any rate here I am still very feeble in every respect except in respect of my affection for you.

I am afraid I'll have to bring poor Jessie again to London and deliver her once more to the surgeons. I am convinced that another carving is necessary before she ceases to be a cripple. The prospect of getting again in touch with you is a positive comfort,—and the only one at this juncture. Borys who is here on convalescent leave (after being gassed and wounded) asks to be remembered to you. John who is too much of a pagan to regard the amenities of a Christian festival merely exclaimed at the mention of your name

[1] *The Rescue.*

"I like him" and rushed off somewhere. We will leave it at that. But Jessie and I send our deepest regard and love with all the best wishes proper to the season, which, somehow, doesn't feel so festive as one expected it to be. A cloud of unreality hangs about men, events, discourses, purposes. The very relief from long-drawn anguish is touched with mistrust as it were if not a delusion then at least a snare.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

*Durrant's Hotel, George St., Manchester Square. W.*1. *Feb. 8th.*1919

My dearest Edward,

We arrived here yesterday ready for a long stay. But the surgeons are sending Jessie home for another two months when they hope the state of the knee will improve sufficiently to render another operation unnecessary. We shall be returning home probably on Thursday. I am still very lame after a very severe gout attack. Will you, my dear Edward, come and dine with me on Monday at the above address? Will you phone a message for me to the hotel; but if you cannot manage Monday then there are still Tuesday and Wednesday for your choice, for I will make no engagement of any sort in the evening. I want very much to see you. I didn't thank you for the book[1] by letter because I knew I was coming to town at once. You know

[1] *Papa's War.*

my opinion of all the pieces composing it. I did admire them not only for the depth and feeling of the satire itself; but for the really marvellous visualising of actors and scenes which really makes me think that you have cheated the world of a great novelist. Our dear love to you

Ever yours

J. C.

Capel House Orlestone Nr Ashford. 12 *March* '19

Dearest Edward,

I ought to have written you days ago to thank you for your letters about the *Resc.* I am deeply touched, my dear old friend, by the fidelity of your memory recalling not only the year but the very episode on which the story was interrupted.[1] It has given me a strange impression of having lived always under your eye; of your thought never having abandoned me during all those years of your lonely wanderings in the jungle of "literary matter" where you alone pursued the spirit with a magnificent disregard of the parasites that fed on your substance.

Pray *do* by all means jot your remarks and criticisms on the margin of the L. & W. text. It will make these numbers precious to me. You know dear Edward that my first impulse (and also the last) was always to agree with your pronouncements. In this instance you give a voice to the vague uneasiness I always felt from

[1] In 1896 the first draft of *The Rescue* ran to 104 MS. pages.

the first while writing the Rescue. And what you say is "la sainte verité". But I could offer thereon some explanations, which may be worthless but are at least sincere. Only not on paper! Not just yet!

We are going for six months into a furnished house (end March). You must come and be friendly, good and wise to me for several days. It's a bigger place. You could get your moments of solitude. It would change you a little from your type of country. Jessie's looking forward immensely to your coming for to her you are my Good Genius and she will show you her affection in her artless manner by concocting various dishes and in everything else showing great discretion. She is beginning to walk. She sends her love.

Ever yours

J Conrad

Monday Spring Grove, Wye, Kent. 7th July '19

Dearest Edward,

It was the instinct (not the sense—the instinct) of what you have discerned with your unerring eye that kept me off the R.[1] for 20 years or more. That—and nothing else. My instinct was right. But all the same I cannot say I regret the impulse which made me take it up again. I am settling my affairs in this world and I should not have liked to leave behind me this evidence of having bitten off more than I

[1] *The Rescue.*

could chew. A very vulgar vanity. Could anything be more legitimate?

The "innumerable multitude" for which I write falls naturally into two parts. One is composed of Edward Garnett and the other of the rest of mankind. To that last I can talk back, to Edward I cannot. And it is not my dear fellow that I have erected you into a fetish. There is nothing mystic in my attitude to you. There never has been. It is not vague dread that you inspired but an absolute confidence.

I wouldn't like you to think my friendship importunate but I must remind you of your promise to come and see us in this house (which is odious). But perhaps sitting smoking together we could manage to forget where we are. Week-end, middle week, any time—and for as many days as you can spare. Only drop Jessie word of your coming. She sends you her love. After Monday next we shall be here all the time till the 25th of August.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

The *Arrow* is to appear in Sep[r] I think. After Miss Hallows left on her holiday I ceased to send you L. & W.[1] from sheer compunction at throwing that thing, too, at your overwhelmed head. They will finish the R. this month and the book-form is planned for the spring 1920.

[1] The weekly paper, *Land and Water*.

Spring Grove Wye 24. 9 19.

Dearest Edward,

My loving thanks for your letter. I don't think there is a single remark you make that I don't understand both in the letter and in the spirit.

I have looked at once, here and there, at your marks and marginal notes in various numbers.[1] I quite see. As it happened I came upon one par. which you condemn in toto but which I can't take out as it bears on the story itself—the plot. But I shall try to put it into other words.

Don't you know my dear Edward how stupid people are! They take delight in merest twaddle, they look out for and welcome the obvious. And they understand hardly anything which is not either one or the other.

Miss H. is looking out and preparing for dispatch to you the Nos you mention.

Yes, the *A. of G.*[2] *is* "swallowed down". The amount of reviewing was really greater than for *any* of my books, I think. People write to each other (and sometimes to me too) about it. Next thing to a "sensation". *The Church Times* (High) the *Guardian* (Evangelical) and the *Methodist Times* (2 notices) are most sympathetic and—yes—almost intelligent. I am not joking. Who would have thought it possible!!

Give my love to David I am glad he likes it. And

[1] Of *The Rescue* serialised in *Land and Water*.
[2] *The Arrow of Gold*.

just hint to him that I am not a musty old reactionary in my feelings. My misfortune is that I can't swallow *any* formula and thus am wearing the aspect of enemy to all mankind.

Jessie sends her dear love. She has been badly lamed by the surgical examination, and spends most of her time in bed. There must be another operation on R. Jones' return from U. S., about middle November —and in Liverpool, as R. J. wants to have her there under his eye. Beastly prospect.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent. Sunday 16 11 .19

Dearest Edward,

God (I don't know his address) is my witness that your two last letters (others too) have been put away amongst the "preciosa" of my study. Miss H. is another witness—more accessible than the other. But why protest so much? The very warmth of your criticism[1] when we were walking up and down on the grass at Spring Grove (you remember) amazed and touched me. That after all these years you should think my work worth so much thought, so much feeling, so much interest gave me almost a feeling of awe. Such friendship gives to one's life a sense of continuity, keeps off that dreadful suspicion of futility which dogs

[1] Of *The Rescue.*

our footsteps and as we grow older treads on our very heels. It was a most unexpected experience and it—nothing else—makes the *Rescue* memorable to me.

I scribbled 3 lines to you directly we got into this house but in the muddle of the first days the envelope may not have been posted. Afterwards I became not so much busy as absorbed. I want to finish something before we move from here to L'pool where Sir R. Jones is going to operate again on Jessie's knee. A horrid prospect! She, as usual serene, sends you her dear love—and had administered a scolding to me for not writing to you long before. In her own obscure and penetrating manner she has understood many years ago how much I owe to you.

I'll stop abruptly here. I have a gouty wrist—not fit to write with. I shall let you know of our departure directly we get a date from the surgeon.

Ever unalterably yours

J. Conrad

85 *Kingsley Rd Princes Park Liverpool* 8 *Dec* 1919

Dearest Edward,

Now we can say for certain that the operation is a success; and we may hope that poor Jessie's troubles are nearing their end. She sends you her love.

My renewed thanks for your marginal notes and

your letters about *The R.* I have started on the text now.

I'll drop you a line in a few days.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

New Year's Day 1920 *Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent*

Dearest Edward,

I won't mock yours and mine philosophy by a parade of good wishes. This is the first letter I write in 1920 and we all here old and young send you our love.

I ought to have written you immediately after our return here—instead of which I became immediately ill with a beastly complaint (not gout) which prevented me sitting up at the table and made me generally unwilling to stir as much as my little finger if it were to save my life.

I am better to-day. As to Mrs Jessie she is going on well and strong; and I see the time when she will become ungovernable. But even that prospect is cheering in comparison to a bed-ridden future which hung over our heads for the last 3 or 4 years.

I've done nothing for the last six weeks and I feel that I'll never do anything any more. Somehow I don't feel so happy about it as I ought to—for what could be more soothing than a sense of impotence.

Give my affectionate New Year's greetings to your wife and to David. I wish more power to his right arm;

for he, at any rate, may yet hope for one (at least) lucky shot against some Philistine or other, in his life.

May you live long enough to see him whirl his sling! As to me I have no such expectation. I admit that I am not buried (or incinerated) yet but I have a strong feeling that I ought to be.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

4. 4. 20. *Oswalds, Bishopsbourne Kent*

Dearest Edward,

I wonder whether you will condescend to look at my handwriting.

My dear fellow ever since we came home from L'pool I have been more or less laid up with gout. Wrists—one after another, ankles—then came bronchitis—days and days in bed.

Through it all I went on struggling with the text of the *Rescue*. You can have no idea in what close communion I felt myself to be with you. I think that every mark of your pen has been attended to.

It is over. Proofs read too. And for the rest I do not care.

Jessie meantime has been (after all these bright hopes following the L'pool operation) getting steadily worse, sinking into unbearable pain and still worse hopelessness. Two days ago Sir R. Jones came down from Scotland and operated again. The relief was in-

stantaneous and now everybody connected with "the case" seems determined that it should be the *last time*. We shall see. She is going on very well and sends you her love.

I feel physically shaken. Mentally so-so. It is only my affection for you that remains unchanged from the old times.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Oswalds Bishopsbourne Kent [*April* 27. 1920.]

Dearest Edward,

Jessie was operated again on the 31 Mch. and after 3 weeks in a Canterbury Nursing Home we brought her here. But unfavourable symptoms have set in again and there will be probably another operation.

Meantime all we can do is to make her pain bearable by means of ice-bags and lotions.

This is our bumper of news and very beastly it is.

I ought to have thanked you long before for your dear letter. My dear Edward! A set of the Ld. Edition has been marked for your own in my thoughts ever since that affair has been planned.

The English publication (of *Rescue*) will be delayed because of some muddle in the delivery of the paper. In U.S. the date is 21st May and if you like I will send you a copy. But I can't imagine anyone so impatient as that for J. C's patched book.

I am feeling perpetually seedy and would gladly not trouble my head about it—if only I could.

I hope David will prosper in his adventure. Give him my most friendly greeting. Jessie sends you her love

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent. 11 *July* '20.

Dearest Edward,

On some days my wrist is so disabled that I can't write at all—and dictating letters is a horror.

Thanks for your letter and the interesting inclosure. Now the thing[1] is done I am ready to forget all about it—all except your interest, the thought and time you've given to it, the great constancy of your friendship. This my dear Edward is what these pages will always mean to me. I tried to make the best of your advice in the general current of the last half; and, as to details, all your remarks and suggestions (in the margin of the *L. & W.* text) have been adopted and followed except in one instance amounting to about a line and a half.

Please tell the writer of the critical note on Mrs. Travers that speaking in all sincerity I am immensely gratified by her appreciation and very much impressed by the acuteness of her analysis. One or two notice

[1] *The Rescue.*

writers felt that there was something wrong. And my answer is *to them* that if I had hung Mrs. Travers for five minutes on Lingard's neck (at the last meeting) they would have been perfectly satisfied. To her I would only advance in palliation that one must take account of facts. The blowing-up of the Emma was a fact. It destroyed suddenly the whole emotional situation not only for them all but also for me. To go on after that was no joke. And yet something had to be done at once! I cared too much for Mrs. Travers to play pranks with her on the line of heroics or tenderness; and being afraid of striking a false note I failed to do her justice—not so much *in action*, I think, as in expression.

After the last incision two weeks ago there is a distinct improvement in Jessie's state. But it will be a long, long job. Our love to you. I'll write again soon.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent. 26. 8. 20.

Dearest Edward,

Thank you for your good letter and enclosure.[1] There was a kneip establishment near Dresden (in 1886) when I went to meet my uncle in Marienbad.

Frankly I have no faith in all these things and I don't want to go to these places (Kneip was a Bavarian

[1] A suggestion that Conrad might try a water cure for the gout.

illuminè) which are odious to me with their pathetic population hypnotised into going through all these tricks and ceremonies, by mere senseless verbiage. Have you read (calmly) the pages you have sent me? Or any other "healer's literature"?

I am taking Jessie for a change to Deal from the 1st to 21st of September. She is beginning to walk (about the house) and sends you her love. Will you name any day, say after the 22nd, for a visit here—as long as you can spare time for.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

P.S.

Write here—Deal is only 18 miles off and letters will be forwarded.

South Eastern Hotel Deal 9 Sep. '20

My *very* dear Edward,

We rejoice at your promise to come to us on the 4 Oct. You must let us know the train which we will meet in *Canterbury* (not Bishopsbourne)

I can't tell you how glad I am to hear that you are going to bring out some critical essays. Their value will endure long, long after the "old timepiece" has really stopped. For, as to the present, those who say it does no longer go are simply unable to hear the golden tick.

Jessie's love.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Oswalds Bishopsbourne Kent 8. 11. 20

Dearest Edward,

I was laid up with very beastly gout when your letter arrived. It seems to me I heard something of that copy.[1] Perhaps Hodgson has sent me the cat^gue? I wondered what it was really but didn't hit on the "medical" solution. I remember now the man very well.

The news of you thinking of a novel is great news. Do, my dearest Edward, do give it an honest trial and who knows! Perhaps it will grip you. As to you getting a hold on it to some purpose I have no doubt of it whatever. I accept the title provisionally (for purposes of reference only) because it is too literal—too explicit —too much of a definition.—You perceive I have sat at your feet, don't you?

But you may call it what you like even An Angel's Tears (an Angel would naturally weep over a fool) and have my excited blessing in any case. Don't be afraid of being rough and of being exquisite. You are quite capable of blending both these strains. You are! And let "all thy words bear the accent of heroic truth" properly seasoned by malice. But before everything switch off the critical current of your mind and work in darkness—the creative darkness which no ghost of responsibility will haunt.

All our loves.

Ever yours J. Conrad

[1] A copy of *An Outcast of the Islands* given in 1896 by E. G. to a doctor.

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent. 16 *Dec.* 1920

My dear Edward,

I sent your name and address to Heinemann so that they should forward you direct your set of the Coll[ed] Edition, which, they say, is to begin to appear this month.

It was nice and dear of you to go and see Jessie when she was in town. She was immensely pleased and told me that you were specially delightful that evening. She has a very strong sense of your personality—always had—Of course these things are obscure in her—yet the feeling is always perfectly genuine.

I have had the Cat. No 1 from Taviton St. and am writing to ask for 2 or 3 items—and also to wish these young men[1] the best of luck.

I have been beastly invalidish these 2 months. I shall take Jessie out south in Jan. It may do me good too—but I doubt it. The Secret Agent (4 acts) has been taken by M'Kinnel. We shall see what comes of it. I have done nothing—can do nothing—don't want to do anything. One lives too long. Yet cutting one's throat would be too scandalous besides being unfair to other parties. Xmas greetings.

Ever affectionately yours

J. Conrad

[1] Francis Birrell and David Garnett.

1921-1922

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent 6. 1 21

My dearest Edward,

I went to Pawling on Wed. morning about the ded^{on} of the *Nigger*. Everybody in the office was appalled—but they took jolly good care to point out that Miss Hallowes and I had to bear our share of the guilt. Miss H. is, in her own words, "frightfully upset" about it; and I won't tell you how bad I feel myself. However I have arranged with Pawling that 780 pages with the dedication should be printed at once and inserted into those sets that are not gone out yet. Those subs^{ers} who have already received their sets will have the dedication page sent to them with an explanatory letter. I must say that S.P. apparently took the matter to heart and instructions to carry the thing out at once were given in my presence.

Miss Hallowes wants me to explain to you that the prelims. were sent to her at Windermere where she was spending her holiday and where she had no copy of *The Nigger* to compare them with.

I, of course, am wholly inexcusable. Pinker when told after his return from the theatre gave me a withering look. Jessie sends her love and hopes it will not affect our relations. I told her I hoped not—and anyhow I am

Ever yours

JOSEPH CONRAD

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent. 17. 1. '21.

My dearest Edward,

We could not find the Crane article [1] in any printed form (either U. K. or U.S.) and so we have dug out an old typescript. I am awfully sorry for the delay, I agree with your opinion of these "War pieces". Oh yes! They are good. And truly in all the work he left behind him there is nothing that could be dismissed as rubbish. For even the *Third Violet* is merely a characteristic failure.

I am sending you also four Nos of *L. Mercury*. I have selected them with some care, and in a spirit of scrupulous fairness.

Aubry and I have been talking you over lately here. You must have felt on that particular evening prolonged shudders as if an infinity of geese had been walking over your grave. (You know the popular saying?) However we can't help our "effete intellects". Still I found in that Frenchman of Frenchmen more sympathetic understanding of you—the real you—than in any Islander I've ever met. Perhaps you don't know—but at that séance at Brown's you were really Great. I am proud of having been discovered by *you* all these years ago.

Jessie sends her dear love. We start on Sunday.

Ever yours

Joseph Conrad

[1] A paper by Conrad reprinted in *Life and Letters*.

18. 3. 21. *Gd Hotel d'Ajaccio Corse*

Dearest Edward,

I am a prey to remorse for not having thanked you yet for the marine prints you mentioned in your letter to the Audrey child. It's very dear of you to have thought of me in that particular way.

To read your letter was the greatest pleasure, for you know praise from you would count against the world. For that very reason blame from you causes me a great concern. It may be I failed to understand the *Ascending Effort*,[1] but I did not mean to treat Bourne disrespectfully. The thesis of his book is vitiated by the fact that poetry and religion having their source in an emotional state may act and react on each other worthily—whereas "Science" at its amplest (and profoundest) is only the exercise of a certain kind of imagination springing either from facts eminently prosaic or from tentative assumptions of the commonest kind of common-sense. And you will admit that Bourne, writing in its slightly grotesque heaviness made it very difficult to read the whole book in a spirit of impartiality—let alone benevolence. I agree with you about Tchehov, absolutely. But that great and wonderful man did not write his stories in praise of the Medical science. Poetical genius must be nourished on knowledge—it can't have too much of it — but you will imagine

[1] *The Ascending Effort*, by George Bourne, 1910.

easily what a poem in praise of knowledge would be like—even if an Archangel came down from Heaven on purpose to write it for our edification.

Nevertheless I am sorry to have provoked your displeasure. But also pray reflect that I had only a column on the last page of the Daily Mail—and that it couldn't either help or hurt Bourne's book. As to myself I simply said (quite superficially) what I thought, and damaged myself in your opinion—which is punishment enough. Justice is satisfied.

I had no idea you had never read the *Autocracy and War*[1] lucubration. How far all that is! I wish I had your M. Guardian article. You are a dear to have made a fuss till they sent you the book; but you cannot doubt that a copy (of the first issue) has been reserved for you. I did not tell Dent to send it to you because I always inscribe your copies and was going to do so on our return from here—which by the by will be at the end of April.

I am glad you like the *Maupassant*. I was never satisfied with it but shall think better of it now. After all the things in that book—it is not my trade! There's not a single one (with the exception of the Censor) that I haven't done unwillingly—against the grain.

I won't bore you with a relation of the Island of Corsica and its inhabitants. This outing is a success as far as Jessie is concerned. She sends her dear love to you. I am neither the better nor the worse for being

[1] The paper reprinted in *Life and Letters*.

here—in health, that is. I would perhaps done some work if I had stayed at home. But God only knows! Head empty. Feelings as of dead—except the feeling of my unalterable affection for you.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Monday. Oswalds. [*April* 11. 1921.]

Dearest Edward,

We returned yesterday, and the first letter I write is to thank you with all the warmth of which I am capable for your review in M. Guardian. Anything coming from you has a particular value and on this occasion you have been as generous to me as you have ever been from the earliest day of your acquaintance, with a deep understanding and clear eyed affection which makes it easy to accept—and indeed to cherish.

Give David my and Jessie's very best and most friendly good wishes on the occasion of his "change of status". I don't know how he may feel about it, but to me marriage still seems as great an adventure as though I myself had never been married. As to his proposed attitude towards a "cold and critical" world it is eminently praiseworthy in its independence and, apart from that, practically very sound. I, in my utter loneliness, was never faced by the problem of "friends". You were the only land one and I remember the charitable indulgence with which you received

the news and the priceless simple kindness with which your wife and you received Jessie when I brought her to the Cearne. From the first you extended to her your characteristic generosity of acceptance of which she became aware early and has received with an admiring understanding of your personality reached by God knows what mysterious intuitive process and therefore perfectly unshakeable—to the end of time.

I rejoice at the news of the American publication of your critical articles in book form. The prospect of your activity dearest Edward arouses my excited interest. We must soon have a talk. There can be no question of me coming to town yet and I don't know how you may feel about running down here when the train service becomes normal again. Drop us a line. I am anxious to know what you have exactly in your mind. Our dear love to you.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

2 *Sepr.* 21.

Dearest Edward,

Many thanks for the MS.[1] and your good and enlightening letter. All your remarks carry absolute conviction and will have to be carried out as occasion offers. The first page of Chapter Ist must be rewritten obviously before the serial begins. Thanks for pointing out the two anachronisms of speech.

[1] Of Conrad's unfinished novel *Suspense*.

Those are most difficult to guard against but the easiest to correct, luckily.

It was good to take contact with your mind and your unerring judgement. It was a great tonic to a solitary man. I am going on with the thing more confidently, now that you have seen it and found it has some quality.

I have just read through the Zeromski novel you mean: *History of a Sin.* Honestly I don't think it will do for translation. The international murderess episodes take but a little space after all. The whole thing is disagreeable and often incomprehensible in comment and psychology. Often it is gratuitously ferocious. You know I am not squeamish. The other work the great historical machine is called *Ashes* (Popioty). Both of course have a certain greatness—the greatness of a wild landscape—and both take too much for granted in the way of receptivity and tolerance.

Our dear love to you

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Monday. [26 *Sept* 21.]

Dearest Edward,

I have warned our friend Pinker that you will be writing to him in the matter of the publication in vol. form of certain selected critical articles of yours; of which some would belong to the collection about to be published in the MS. and others specially

reserved by you for the English edition. I hope I have not misrepresented your intention.

J. B. Pinker declares himself ready and anxious to make the best possible arrangement for this. I don't suppose you have changed your mind, but in any case please let Pinker know what you want done—or not done.

Love from us all here.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent. 22. 12. '21.

Dearest Edward,

Many thanks for your letter, which moved me deeply with the sense of your affection continued for so many years.

I am grieved to learn that you have not had your copy of *Notes on L. & L.*[1] Miss H. waved in my face a list of names where your name stands first with a cross against it and the letter (E) after it—meaning an English ed. copy sent! There must be a special devil with a mission to make trouble between us. As you know the Jewish God (under whom you and I were born) is not always direct in his methods. It would have been simpler to put hatred into our hearts without all that low intriguing. But I always suspected him of being a Futile Person.

[1] *Life and Letters.*

I haven't a copy at this moment in the house—but you shall have one before the year is out. Your suspicion of Pawling is not justified I think. I believe he really meant to have that dedication page put in. He had also reminders—because I know that *I* did mean it. And now it is done!

Our best wishes my dear Edward. In this world where the seasons of curses and congratulations are still ruled by the Jewish God it is not prudent to be more precise—at least for us incorrigible Gentiles.

But I commend you to the Merciful, the Compassionate—the same whom I would like to look on me at times. Of course I know He can't do much. Still . . .

Give my best regards to your wife and my congratulations on the triumphant achievement of Dost.[1] and my season's greetings to David.

Ever affectly yours

J. Conrad

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne Kent 27. I. 22.

Dearest Edward,

I've been in bed for about 3 weeks and this is the first time I am using a pen for God knows how long.

Thanks my dearest fellow for the Chehov vol. He is too delightful for words. Very great work. Very great.

[1] *The Works of Fyodor Dostoevsky.* Translated by Constance Garnett. Vols. i.-xii., 1921.

Do tell your wife of my admiration that grows and grows with every page of her translations I read. The renderings in this vol have impressed me extremely.

Jessie sends her love.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent May 24th. 1922.

Dear Edward,

I am extremely disgusted at not being able to write to you myself, but I must thank you for the volume [1] which has just arrived—the pure light of the past cutting across with a tender, softer ray the first-class illuminative arrangements under which we live to-day. What I have felt and thought is more suitable for talk, warm and many coloured, than for the cold blue tint of the typewriter. Let me only say at once that the American papers have fascinated me by the illuminative quality of the statement of the whole case and by the particular insight in the appreciation of the men.

I am trying to get through a sort of long short story (the title of which is *The Rover*) so as to complete a volume this year. I have done no work that matters for the last eighteen months and I have not looked at the novel since December last. But then since December last I have been laid up four times

[1] *Friday Nights.* Literary Criticisms and Appreciations, by Edward Garnett. Cape, 1922.

without ever being given a chance to recover my tone and grapple with my work. For the last week though my right hand has been tied up I have been able to work with a certain sense of mastery over my subject.

We must certainly arrange to meet soon and it ought to be here, my dear Edward, because as soon as I get away from home I seem to go to pieces mentally and physically. Except for not running about naked I have become a complete savage and look upon all mankind with hostility—I mean the mankind in the street: exactly like a Masai warrior perambulating the bush.

I will make you a signal about joining company for a few days directly *The Rover* has ceased to rove—and be damned to him. You have no idea how that fellow and a lot of other crazy creatures that got into my head have also got on my nerves. I have never known anything like this before. I have been infinitely depressed about a piece of work, but never so exasperated with anything I have had to do.

We are sorry to hear of your wife having had a bad time. Give her our love and sympathy

Ever yours

J. Conrad

22. 8. '22.

Dearest Edward,

I had no doubt you would feel deeply Hudson's death.

I was never intimate with him but I always thought of him with real affection The secret of his charm

both as a man and as a writer remains impenetrable to me. A little uncanny. Yet there was nothing more *real* in letters—nothing less tainted with the conventions of art; I mean the most legitimate. He was a nature-production himself and had something of its fascinating mysteriousness. Something unique is gone out of the world. Yes my dear Edward we will miss him—you of course more than I. But then I am much older than you and begin to feel resigned.

Do my dear fellow. Come down next Thursday 31st—isn't it? On the 30 I must lunch with Galsworthy whom I have not seen for ages.—Strange fellows these Harmsworths! It is as if they had found Aladdin's lamp. Strangest still to think that I had been more intimate with N.[1] than with Hudson. Funny world this.

Ever yours

J. C.

(*Sept.* 12. 1922.)

My dearest Edward,

This is copy of letter I wrote to Dent. It speaks for itself.

Ever yours

J. C.

To J. M. Dent & Son

I have your letter, for which thanks.

As regards the article on Hudson suggested by Dr Smyth, of the Times Book Review, I am the last person to write an "authoritative" paper on W.H.H.

[1] Lord Northcliffe.

I don't suppose I have met Hudson ten times in my life, though when we did meet he was always extremely kind and friendly to me. It is six or seven years, or perhaps more, since I saw Hudson last. We never corresponded on any subject of general interest, and I have not a scrap of his writing in my possession.

The person eminently fitted to write an authoritative article is, of course, Edward Garnett, Hudson's friend for more than twenty years, one of his earliest appreciators long before the public, or for that matter the publishers, recognised the high quality of Hudson's work which he did his utmost to make known to the world. They saw each other frequently and I believe, corresponded regularly. I do not suppose there is another man who has such a profound knowledge of Hudson's work as Edward Garnett. I understand that E. G. is planning a study of Hudson which would be exactly the thing for the Times Book Review and for your own purpose in the way of "authority" and sympathy. You could do no better than suggest Garnett to your friends in America for the work which I absolutely decline to undertake.

27. 10. 22

Dearest Edward,

Many thanks for D's little tale.[1] It is the most successful thing of the kind I have ever seen. There is somehow a slight flavour of 18th Century

[1] *Lady into Fox*, by David Garnett. Chatto and Windus, 1922.

manner of diction which is quite fascinating. The earnest flow of the narrative has not a single uncertain note. And considering how many occasions there were to go wrong I am impressed either by the wonderful genuineness of his imagination or his surprising mastery over it. The whole psychology man and beast is, I should say, flawless, in essence and exposition. Altogether an accomplished piece of work, touchingly amusing and without a single mistake (that I can see) in style, tone or conception. My most friendly congratulations to David on this little piece so thoroughly done. Nothing of the amateur there. Every page holds.

. . . . . .

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Tuesday [*Oct.* 31. 1922] *Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent*

Dearest Edward,

I hope Jessie explained clearly yesterday. Herewith 2 upp. circles for tomorrow.[1] I don't know whether they will be of any use to you.

The thing has been marvellously vulgarised. I don't know whether to laugh or to swear. Of course it is not the actors fault—it's their destiny. They can no more help themselves than the immortal gods can. And I,

[1] First performance of *The Secret Agent* at the Ambassadors' Theatre, Nov. 2, 1922.

too am the victim of my weakness in suffering these ridiculous agonies.

Are we to see you tomorrow? (Friday)

Ever yours

J. Conrad

7. 11. '22 *Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent*

Dearest Edward,

It was very good of you to write to Jessie. I did not ask you to give me your opinion just because it was for me the only one that mattered. Your subtlety (if not your affection) will understand what I mean. I am much reassured by what you say. You evidently think it an honest piece of work not altogether written in the dark—and certainly not from mere vanity—just to show.

All you say of the acting is Gospel truth. Yes! I was unjust to the professor.

On Friday I made large cuts—the same I wanted to make 3 weeks ago but was not permitted. Funny mentality, that of Stage people.

Our love to you

Ever yours

J. C.

17. 11. '22

Dearest Edward,

I am truly glad to know that your leg is improving.

It was dear of you to write to me again after seeing the play for the second time.

Your letter is very comforting. Of course a failure is disagreeable; but this one has affected me very little. I am myself surprised at my indifference. And to tell you the truth I foresaw what was going to be said—even to the very words and tones. It isn't very strange after all. If you know the vocabulary of a hundred learned parrots you will know what they will screech out at you when you open the door. I knew the vocabulary. It isn't very extensive—you know.

A "man of theatre", a producer, assured me that every line I wrote was eminently "actable". He also told me that to his mind the play was altogether miscast. All this matters nothing now. I suppose every playwright that ever failed has been told something of the kind. I don't think I will again court failure in that way. It would be an objectless thing to do, for from the nature of things I cannot hope to affirm myself in the end. More press cuttings are pouring in. There seems to be a sort of controversy started on the merits and effects of theatrical criticism. Jessie sends her dear love.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

1923–1924

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent. March 10th, 1923.

Dearest Edward,

I was just preparing to write to you—but certainly not to the Maison Basque. I didn't know you were a Basque; and had any right to date your letters from your national habitation. Life is full of surprises!

One of them certainly was Mr. Beer, who had communicated with me through dear old Hamlin Garland some time last July or August. I was under the impression I had told you something about it; but truth to say I attached no importance whatever to the episode which had something to do with a batch of Mrs. Crane's letters. Anyway I knew that there was such a person, and that a biography of Crane was in contemplation. About a week ago I heard from Eric Pinker that Beer and Knopf wanted to see me. They came here last Thursday and Beer did mention to me that he had had a talk with you. Your good letter arrived on Friday morning, after their visit.

Its object was to ask me to write an introduction for the aforesaid biography. God knows I don't want to play the ghoul, feeding on the memory of my friends; . . . that trip is not going to be a lecturing tour but simply a visit to Doubleday at his home in Oyster Bay, for three weeks or so. As I can't suppose that Doubleday intends to keep me shut up in his cellar

for all that time I fully expect to be let in for some at least semi-public appearances. . . . But the less I think of it the better, or I may die of funk before I put foot on that distant shore. They begin already to talk about it. David Bone heard of it in New York and very kindly asked me to come over with him. Muirhead will be there too, and we have got to join on April 21st, in Glasgow—but I haven't yet got my ticket. That I should want a ticket in order to go on board a ship on a foreign voyage seems to me the most absurd thing in the world.

Anyway the whole thing doesn't bear thinking about, and that is why I didn't tell you of it before. There would have been an awful finality about it. And now there is; though I don't quite believe yet that it will ever come off.

Of course, I will have to come to London before I go, and we will have a long talk. That confounded Introduction, which I haven't begun yet, is worrying me.

Jessie suggests that if I asked you nicely you would perhaps come down to see us for a couple of days before the end of this month, at any time convenient to you. Well, I am asking you nicely now; and I am sure that, (as Mr. Ratsch would say), "the amiability of your character and the elevation of your sentiments will induce you to visit the house of the departing."

I am no end pleased at David's book going so strong. Did you see the review in the (American)

Bookman? Give him my greeting and congratulations.

Mrs. C. sends her love.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent. 25. *March.* 1923.

Dearest Edward,

Your wire was a great blow. It was good of you to write from the bed of sickness. We are so sorry. I could not leave for U.S. without seeing you but you will be mended long before the date which is 20th April. I hope your 'flu if very disabling will not be very serious. Should you shake it off soon perhaps a couple of days here would do you no harm. I will be leaving this on the 16th.

Jessie sends her love. She is again very lame and somewhat depressed.

The Crane article for Beer is gone. It's just personal gossip, not critical—not even literary. Our first day together and so on. I have asked Miss H. to take a copy of the passages in which I mention you which I'll send you in my next letter.

Ever affect[ly] yours

Joseph Conrad

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent. Aug. 8th. 1923.

Dearest Edward,

I am sorry I put in an, apparently, unlucky form what I had to say about the two pieces of prose which you sent me. Don't forget, my dear, that I wrote to you, not to the young man; therefore there could not be any question of putting the matter in a form which would spare his feelings. Neither did I wish for a moment to influence your opinion or your helpful attitude towards his work. I repeat again that I may be utterly wrong as against your general judgment which was formed, also, on, no doubt correct, personal impression of a temperament (such as you describe it) attempting to express itself in terms of art.

It was that attempt alone on which I concentrated—on the actual pages before me which, ex-hypothesi, ought to have been revelatory. I mean the pages, not the subjects. Subjects in themselves never appear revelatory to me, if only because subjects are, so to speak, common property, lying about on the ground for one man after another to pick up and handle. That is what makes a subject such an insignificant thing, and also invests it with the potentiality of almost infinite suggestion. It depends really on him who picks it up.

The possession of a special temperament ought to make itself felt in the expression. I quite believe that his temperament is such as you describe it to me; but

the fact is, my dear Edward, that somehow or other the story, as you told it to me, in say, about a hundred words, impressed me much more than the column of print which I read. You don't know how good you were in your extremely simple resumé. And that not by any means as a result of some trick of a born raconteur. You certainly haven't got them. You displayed neither animation, not conventional fluency; yet, as I often remarked when talking with you, your personality came through somehow, made the thing significant and distinctly worth hearing.

I felt nothing of the kind when reading the article. That's what it all amounts to. I will not for a moment suppose that you are wrong in your opinion as to the possibilities of future productions from that pen. But he, obviously, should be warned against a careless use of words and a too close contemplation of his subject. That of course doesn't mean that he should be told to *strive* for a personal expression. No! It is either in him or it is not in him. But a certain fastidiousness which would prevent him from putting down the first words that came into his mind ought to be cultivated, or else both his sympathies and his indignations will lose much of their force.

But who am I to lecture anybody, who have reasoned out and meditated so many pages of my own only to give them up in despair! My feelings ought to have nothing to do with this letter—or perhaps with any letter. These are matters more fit for intimate speech; and I am conscious of having talked with you so openly

all my life that you have nothing more about me to learn.

Jessie sends her dear love.

Ever affectly yours

J. Conrad

[*August*. 1923.]

Dearest Edward,

You must pardon this scrawl in answer to your good letter. I was touched by your memory of old times. If I said anything as what you quote it was sheer impertinence. I did not know then what style was; and if I have any conception of it now, it cannot be other than very primitive. But—as I said in one of my prefaces—you were "always very patient with me at that time." And you are that now. Your dear and touching letter proves it.

My dear, in your feelings, in your judgments, your enthusiasms and criticisms, in all your fine reactions to that "best" which not every eye can see, you have been beautifully consistent, both in your subtle and your peremptory moods. It is thirty years now (almost to a day) since I came ashore for good. And the very next year our friendship began! Straight from the sea into your arms, as it were. How much you have done to pull me together intellectually only the Gods that brought us together know. For I myself don't. All I had in my hand was some little creative gift—but not even one single piece of "cultural" luggage. I am

proud after all these years to have understood you from the first.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

P.S.

Jessie sends her love.

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent. 20. 9. 23.

Dearest Edward,

I was over in Havre arranging for John's stay in France ("to acquire the language") when your dear letter and your introduction to Hudson's correspondence [1] arrived.

Those pages are first rate and I am glad you have been moved to write them. Thanks my dearest fellow for the inscribed copy. It is the most touching and penetrating appreciation of a personality that I have ever read.

On our return last Sunday (for Jessie went over with me) I developed a temperature, (God knows why!) which kept me in bed till today: or else you would have heard from me before.

Jessie sends her dear love.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

[1] *Letters from W. H. Hudson.* Edited and with an Introduction by Edward Garnett. Nonesuch Press, 1923.

21. *Nov.* '23.

Dearest Edward,

Yes, Quinn promised to keep the MSS. together—but the mood passes and the promise goes with it. But did you ever hear of anything so idiotic as this sale? But it is my greatest success! People who never heard of me before will now know my name. Others who have never been able to read through a page of mine are convinced that I am a great writer. If I only could let it get about (discreetly) that the whole thing was a put up job between Quinn and me and that I got my share of the plunder I believe I would become "universally respected". But that is too much to hope for.

The Rover my dear Edward is not what you have seen. It's an eighty thousand word thing I finished in July 1922. Since it had no wealthy young squires and French countesses in it I did not intrude it on your notice. It is Revolutionary and you are an Aristocrat. I know you well. But I did mention it to you, slightly —once. However you will soon have your copy and be able to jump on it with both feet. I won't mind as long as it does not make you sick. A thing of sentiment—of many sentiments.

Ever yours

J. C.

Will be looking impatiently for H's letters.

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent. Nov. 30th. 1923.

Dearest Edward,

I have been laid up for days and days and your volume of H's. letters was most welcome alleviation to the worry and general horror of the situation. I think that your little introduction at the beginning is the most charming and touching thing that I ever remember having read. The Letters themselves of course are particularly interesting. It is extraordinary how his correspondence reproduces the accent of his talk. But I was glad to have the man brought close to me once more, and, as it were, led up and commented upon in your friendly voice.

I dictate this because I am not fit to sit up long enough to write a whole letter in pen and ink. In fact I don't feel very fit even for dictation. The Patron of Letters has "delivered the goods" in his own inimitable style, and here is your own copy[1]—the first to leave the house. I would have sent it two days before only I wanted to be able to scrawl the inscription.

Ever your own

J. Conrad

[1] *The Rover.*

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent. Dec. 4th. 1923.

My dearest Edward,

I am so sorry I can not answer you by hand. I have been flattened out more than I can remember by this last bout.

The generosity of your criticism,[1] my dear Edward, is great enough to put heart into a dead man. As I have not claimed to be more than only half-dead for the last month, I feel, after reading your letter, like a man with wings. Every word of your commendation has electrified the dulled fibres of my being. My absolute belief in your sincerity in questions of literary art has relieved me of that load of weary doubt which I have not been able to shake off before. It relieved me thoroughly, because the belief in the absolute unflawed honesty of your judgment has been one of the mainstays of my literary life. Even if led astray, even if apparently mistaken, there is that in you which remains impeccable in its essence. In all your literary judgments there is never anything suspect. Your very prejudices are genuinely personal and, in a manner of speaking, can be thoroughly trusted.

Therefore I gather like a real treasure all the words of commendation you give to Cath., Arlette, and the doctrinaire Real. I gather them the more eagerly because what I most feared in the secret of my heart was an impression of sketchiness. This is perhaps my only work in which brevity was a conscious aim. I don't

[1] Of *The Rover*.

mean compression. I mean brevity ab initio, in the very conception, in the very manner of thinking about the people and the events. I am glad you find Peyrol captivating; and indeed I am made glad by all the appreciative remarks you make which are much, very much beyond my highest expectations; though of course, my dear, I won't pretend I did not know that you would be looking for good points and make the most of them; for nothing can be less doubtful to me than your affection and your amazing faculty of comprehension. What you say about the English side of the book—the fleet, the Vincent scenes etc.—shows how you do marvellously respond to the slightest shades, the faintest flavours, the simplest indications of sentiment underlying the action. My dear Edward, it is good to write while there is a reader like you about.

And of course your critical ability, that very sensitiveness in response, has made you put your finger on the weak spot. I can honestly say that I did see it myself but not so clearly as since I have read your letter. You were not likely to miss Scevola, and, by Jove, now you have uttered the words he does look to me like a bit of a "scarecrow of the Revolution" Yet it was not my intention. It is not the fault of the original conception but the fault of presentation, of the literary treatment. But apart from that, to take him fundamentally—pray look at my difficulty! Postulating that Arlette had to remain untouched, the terrorist that brought her back could have been nothing else than what he is or the book would have had to be

altogether different. To me S. is not revolutionary, he is, to be frank about it, a pathological case more than anything else. I won't go into a deeper exposition. Your intelligence will take the hint at once. The situation at Escampobar could not have lasted seven or eight years if S. had been formidable. But he was never formidable except as a creature of mob psychology. Away from the mob he is just a weak-minded creature. As you know there were many like that. I tried to give a hint of it in what Catherine says about him: "the butt of all the girls," "always mooning about," "run away from his home to join the Revolution." He is weak-minded in a way as much as my poor Michel, the man with the dog, whose resigned philosophy was that "somebody must be last." Even amongst terrorists S. was considered a poor creature. But his half-witted soul received the impress of the Revolution which has missed the simple minded Michel altogether. I never intended S. to be a figure of the Revolution. As a matter of fact if there is a child of the Revolution there at all, it is Real, with his austere and pedantic turn of mind and conscience. The defect of Scevola, my dear Edward, is alas in the treatment, which instead of half-pathetic makes him half-grotesque; and no amount of wriggling and explaining will do away with the fact that so far he is a failure. A created figure that requires explaining to Edward Garnett *is* a failure. That is my sincere conviction. But as to a "formidable" Scevola . . .

Yes, my dear. I know you will believe me when I

tell you that I had a momentary vision of quite a great figure worthy of Peyrol; the notion of a struggle between the two men. But I did deliberately shut my eyes to it. It would have required another canvas. No use talking about it. How long would I have had to wait for that mood?—and the mood of the other was there, more in accord with my temperament, more also with my secret desire to achieve a feat of artistic brevity, once at least, before I died. And on those grounds I believe you will forgive me for having rejected probably a greater thing—or perhaps only a different one.

What I regret now is the rejection of a half thought-out scene, four pages or so, between Catherine and Scevola. But when it came to me the development of the story was already marked and the person of Catherine established psychologically as she is now. That scene would have checked the movement and damaged the conception of Catherine. It would have been, and it would have looked, a thing "inserted". I was feeling a little bit heartsick then, too, and anxious also to demonstrate to myself as soon as possible that I could finish a piece of work. So I let it go.

Here you have, my dear Edward, the confession of my weaknesses in connection with the secret history of *The Rover*. Had I been writing with pen and ink I would probably come nearer to expressing myself. You can form no idea of how much your letter has eased and comforted me, even physically. It was good of you to have written at once and while (as you say) "heavy with a cold". I hope it isn't the beginning of

anything. I hope too, my dear, that you will be able to let me have a look at you soon. As soon as you like. You know, it won't be really safe for me to come up to town for quite a long time.

My love to you.

Yours ever

J. Conrad

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent. 11*th December.* 1923

Dearest Edward,

Thanks for your dear friendly letter.

Pray let me know how you are. I am better. But my dear fellow a gout (the most obscure of diseases) of thirty-two years' standing (and when the patient is sixty-five years old) is not to be driven off by the Medicine-men incantations. My dear, I consulted people in France (Montpellier) and in England, in Switzerland. I have tried all sorts of treatment and diet. Of course it will do me in the end—but one must go sometime. Don't be angry and let me know about yourself.

Ever yours

J. C.

Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, Kent. 11*th May.* 1924.

Dearest Edward,

I can hold a pen yet. For weeks I've had a bad wrist; or I would have thanked you before for the *M. at the Z.*[1] D. may be congratulated in pulling

[1] *The Man in the Zoo*, by David Garnett. Chatto and Windus, 1924.

off this piece with great tact and subtlety. I think that, upon the whole, he has done well *not* to emphasize the irony more, against his Father's advice. It was undutiful, of course; but it was wise. My view is that the initial quarrel of the lovers (deliciously absurd) gave the note—and the whole thing is perfectly in tune as it stands. I think he would be capable, if he let himself go, of a very pleasant ferocity. "The Twilight of the Gods" had more than a whiff of it in its gentle playfulness. . . .

Old days!

From a purely "worldly" point of view I regret that this is "the second". Not that I think one better than the other—but the *L. into F.* was more "intimate" (no doubt about it) and had a note of anxious pathetic earnestness in the narrative which I believe accounted for some fashionable tears which, I am assured, were shed over it. This one is a trifle harder. What will the public say?

And now what next? The fount could not have been dried by these two dips. I am very interested. Give D. my affectionate greeting.

Jessie sends her love.

Ever yours

J. Conrad

THE END

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